

Personal Dressing and Decorum in Islam at All Times

During the month of Ramadan 2011, several Muslims were seen especially dressed-up to Hadith specifications clothing; but after Ramadan, they resumed their regular dressing clothes. Their “regular dressing clothes” for both women and men also constituted certain skimpiness in clothing, and in some cases skin-tight clothes, which clearly shows exactness of body contours; and which is not permitted in Islam. To wear Hadith specification clothing only during month of Ramadan, and then, abandoning them after Ramadan, is certainly a visible dimension of hypocrisy.

Islam is not only a simple religion, but it is also an inherent decreed way of life, decreed in the Holy Qur’an nearly 1,500 years ago; and today, internationally recorded statistics have established Islam as the world’s fastest growing religion, as the most popular religion of choice, and in numerical stacking, it is the second largest religion in the world (after Christianity).

Basic fact: Islam is the religion of humanity. Accordingly, Islam also has some behavioural characteristics, so that people in Islam become exemplary communities to the rest of the world. Personal dressing and decorum in Islam at all times are issues explored analytically in this article.

No limitation is placed upon the form or quality of clothing, either in the Holy Qur’an or the Traditions (Hadith). Islam requires no particular dress as compulsive, but dwells on prescriptive modesty, expressly recommended for Muslims at all times and not just in the month of Ramadan.

A person may choose what that person eats or what that person wears. The only thing required in Islam is that the food must be halal and the clothes must be clean and suitable in modesty. Anything, which may serve as prescribed respectable covering for the body, is allowed. Hadith (*Bukhari*) LXXII Chapter at 2: 675, is reported by Ibn Abbas, the Prophet (pbuh) said: “Eat what you wish and wear what you wish if you can avoid two things, extravagance and conceit.”

Islam is last of the three Semitic religions (the other two are Judaism and Christianity) and hence similar prohibition also reigns within the Law of Moses in the Torah and the Bible (in the Old Testament).

Reverting to clothing and dress code, a simple sheet or trousers or shorts (below the knee) may serve the very basic purpose, and so a shirt or a coat or a loose coat, so long as it covers the parts indecent to expose; in a man the minimum stated is what is between the navel and the knee, (for example “Three-Quarter Pants”); and in a woman all except -

- (a) the full face;
- (b) the hands as far as the wrists; and
- (c) the feet as far as the ankles.
- (d) Tradition shows that women were permitted to roll-up and uncover their hands up to the elbow, so as not to impede in their daily household chores within the general precincts of their homes.

When people are dressed, their feet must show. The Prophet (pbuh) forbade people wearing long robes which dragged on the ground behind those people. Hadith (*Bukhari*) LXXII, Chapter at 1: 674 reports that Abdullah bin Umar said what the Prophet (pbuh) told him: “Allah will not look at the person who drags his/her garment (behind him/her) out of conceit.” This refers to people who want to show their wealth and wear flowing garments of long-dresses, skirts, cloaks or robes, which drags behind them and without showing their feet. In another Hadith (*Bukhari*) LXXII, Chapter at 5:683, Abdullah bin Umar states: “The Prophet (pbuh) said, “whoever drags his/her clothes on the ground out of pride and arrogance, Allah will not look at him/her on the Day of Resurrection.””

There is however, some restriction in the colour of clothing worn by Muslims and the same restriction also applies to painting buildings and painting Muslims’ places of worship. Three colours which are not recommended are single shades of all-yellow, single-shades of all-red and single shades of all-saffron. These three particular colours have historically been associated, always, with paganism and the widespread idol-worshipping communities. However, mixed colours configuration also containing shades of yellow, red or saffron are permissible. Hadith (*Bukhari*) Chapter at 8:62 reports: “Umar ordered the building of the Mosque and said: “I give people shelter from rain;

and beware of painting it red or yellow, for thou wilt thus causes people to fall into trial.””

In another Hadith (*Bukhari*) LVXII Chapter at 37:743 reports: *“Narrated ibn Umar: “Allah’s Apostle forbade that a person should wear clothes dyed with saffron.””*

A more detailed explanation on colours was given in an earlier paper by same author, titled “Colour Restrictions in Islam.”

An important point to note is that the universality of Islam covers people of all races and regardless whichever language they speak and whichever culture they practise. From historical perception, Islam also takes into consideration variables in the changes within technology and civilisation, which directly impact the wider society. The common denominator remains, that all Muslims are required to practice the Muslim culture, which in many cases sets them apart from others who are not Muslims. In most cases this aspect is visibly distinguishable and Muslim ladies can be picked out of a crowd, because of their specific dressing.

The universality of Islam also covers people of different income classifications; and it is common knowledge that Muslims are ranging from very poor threshold, to middle or average income bracket and those who are extremely rich at top-end. Islam advocates simplicity and levelling off all people when in public places.

As to what parts of her body a woman is required to have clothed, and what parts she may uncover, the following synopsis covers both the Holy Qur’an injunction and established Tradition in various Hadith: It means the adornment of dress or other clothes that a woman normally wears; in other words, she is not required to further cover the clothes she normally wears.

Silk is not permitted for men but women *may* wear it, but it is still a show of wealth by women, which shows that silk is not discarded for men on account of any impurity attaching to it, but because the wearing of it is not in consonance with the hard life which men have had to lead to earn their living, and also because it is a demonstration of luxury. In the same token, eating

food from silver or gold utensils is prohibited. Utensils made of precious metals are also demonstrations of luxury.

Once a silk garment was presented to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and he wore it and said his prayers in it; but afterwards he took it off, as though he did not like it. Another Hadith (*Bukhari*) Chapter at 30: 337 is reported by *Abdur-Rahman bin Abhi Laila*: *“We were sitting in the company of Hudhalfa who asked for water and a Magian brought him water. But when he placed the cup in his hand, he threw it at him and said: “Had I not forbidden him to do so more than once or twice?” He wanted to say: “I would not have done so,” adding “but I heard the Prophet (pbuh) saying: “Do not wear silk or Diyahaj, and do not drink in silver or golden vessels, and do not eat in plates of such metals, for such things are for the unbelievers in this worldly life and for us in the Hereafter.”*

The feature make-up of a man or a woman, like his or her clothes, is a matter of choice. Very long hair in the case of men was not approved. One may have his head shaved or keep his hair short or long. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) himself is reported to have worn his hair in different ways; but never in extended length as would a woman keep her hair. His hair was never lower than his shoulders. He did not approve of clothing that was practically cross-gender, something that we see very widespread nowadays, with girls and women wearing men’s clothing.

Trimming of men’s beard and clipping short the moustache is, however, recommended. Men may have clean shave, grow stubble or have full-beard and it is a matter of their personal choice and permitted. Whichever choice is elected, the external appearances must be neat, trimmed, not unkempt and free of sweaty odours.

The use of perfumes is recommended in many Traditions, especially on Friday when there is an assemblage of people and to women in particular. The close gathering of people at prayer must become encouraging with pleasant perfumes, rather than offensive odours from people’s body and their dressing attires, and which may discourage people at prayer when standing close together.

While women may make use of any ornaments they like, men are allowed only the wearing of a seal ring. The reference is made to scripture, Holy Qur'an 24: 30–31 under caption of Preventative Measure, in *Surah Al-Nur*:

“30 Say to the believing men that they lower their gaze and restrain their sexual passions. That is purer for them. Surely Allah is Aware of what they do.”

“31 And say to the believing women that they lower their gaze and restrain their sexual passions and do not display their adornment except what appears thereof. And let them wear their head coverings over their bosoms. And they should not display their adornment except to their husbands or their fathers, or the fathers of their husbands, or their sons, or the sons of their husbands, or their brothers, or their brother's sons, or their sister's sons, or their women, or those to whom their right hands possess, or guileless male servants, or to children who do not know a women's nakedness. And let them not strike their feet so that the adornment they hide may be known. And turn to Allah all, O believers, so that you may be successful.”

Men are enjoined to lower their gaze, just as women are enjoined to do so in the next verse (24: 31). This injunction is given as a preventive measure against an evil, which deals a deathblow to all pure social relations, viz, the temptations which may lead to evils of fornication.

The Holy Qur'an not only forbids an evil, but also points out the way, by Muslim women's walking, in which men may be attracted to the Muslim women. In similar note, Muslim women walking with noisy stilettos, jingling ankle-bells (*pajeb* and *ghungroo* in Hindustani and Urdu) are attractions, which they should not do (Holy Qur'an 24:31 *“And let them not strike their feet....”).*

Both men and women are required to keep their eyes cast down; so that when they meet each other, neither should men stare at women; nor should women stare at men.

In sectors of society in which Muslim women never appeared in public, the injunction for men to lower their gaze would be meaningless; and the similar injunction to Muslim women given in the next verse, if they never left the compounds of their houses, would indeed be absurd. In widely plural society, such as Fiji, and the Western countries, where men and women are both

employed and in same work places, the injunction to lower each other's gaze applies most appropriately.

To guard the relations between males and females, and to control a too-free intermingling of men and Muslim women, the Holy Qur'an lays down another injunction in addition to that, which requires both sexes to lower their gaze when they meet each other. It requires women in particular not to display their adornment. The term "adornment" here refers both to women's natural body contours and beauty of her body, including external adornments.

The term "*And let them not strike their feet so that the adornment they hide may be known*" refers to the desire of some women; who wear clusters of ankle bells (called *pajeb* and *ghungroo* in Hindustani and Urdu) and who walk with strong striking of feet so the bells attract the attention of other men. This happens in some communities.

It also means the adornment that a woman is not required to cover, such as collyrium (called *surma* in Hindustani and Urdu), rings, bracelets, her face, hands up to elbow and feet; in many ways the woman's dressing protocols are similar to a Christian nun's in her prescribed habit.

Even in prayer - a woman must not cover her face, hands and feet. She needs to be recognised who she is and that she is at prayer.

In summary, Muslim men are not compelled to grow beard, any hairstyle or wear any special design of clothing. Clothing is expected to differ from country to country, depending on geographical characteristics and climatic variations, and the particular nature of their employments. The general dressing of Arabs is dictated by their need to suit extreme desert climatic conditions and certainly not a compulsion to all Muslims in other parts of the world to follow them and dress up like Arabs.

There are over 2.2 billion Muslims throughout the world, currently, and found in almost every country, comprising 26.4% of world population. The Muslims are required both by Holy Qur'an and Tradition to obey the good governance of each country where they live. Consequently, the traditional clothing of the denizens of each country is continued through and accepted within Islam. The Holy Qur'an advocates democracy by Muslims in any country where they live,

and this is given at 4:58, as *“Surely Allah commands you to make over trusts to those worthy of them, and that when you judge between people, you judge with justice. Surely Allah admonishes you with what is excellent. Surely Allah is ever Hearing, Seeing.”*

For example, in China alone there are over 47 million Muslims and they all wear the same traditional Chinese dressing and generally it is not possible to visibly differentiate a Chinese Muslim from other than Muslim Chinese.

It is a fallacy that Muslims must have beard, wear long robes and skullcaps or turbans.

There is no compulsion in personal appearance, but modesty dictates.

There is, however compulsion to practice the following Muslims’ five principles:

1. Belief in One God.
2. Prayer five times daily.
3. Charity (*zakat*) at rate of 2.5% of income per person.
4. Fasting for those in good health and with qualifying prescribed exceptions.
5. Pilgrimage for those who can.

The belief in One God is on principle that God always is. He has no beginning and He will have no end. He has no spouse. He begets not nor is He begotten. God is not material, cannot be seen with material eyes or felt and hence not governed by principles of aging from fatigue.

Prayer five times daily is spiritual nourishment for the soul. A person is an entity and has two sub-entities as – (1) the material body and (2) the spiritual soul. People eat material food few times a day to nourish the material body. They must also pray five times daily to nourish the spiritual soul.

Charity at 2.5% of income is the act of levelling socio-economic benefits of those who do not have basics with those who have. Fasting becomes an institution for the improvement of the moral and spiritual conditions of man. The object is that man can strengthen his will in shunning evil and hence fasting does not mean simply abstaining from food as show of strength,

sustainability and dedication, but abstaining from evil (that which is otherwise lawful and also abstain from all evil ways which), are forbidden by God. This is necessary in the moral elevation of man.

In pilgrimage, a Muslim completely surrenders himself/herself to his/her beloved Allah and the Master of the entire Universe and sacrificed all his/her worldly interests for Allah's sake.

The contents of this article should be circulated widely to all other Muslims, as required by the Holy Qur'an at 3:103, as *"And from among you there should be a party who invite to good and enjoin the right and forbid the wrong. And these are they who are successful."*

Fiji