



IS IT NECESSARY FOR A WOMAN TO COVER HER FACE AND FEET?

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ وَبَرَكَاتُهُ

The answer to the question depends on who is present with the lady, as it varies. In a certain situation a woman is not required to cover any part of her body (with her husband) in another she should not even be present (an individual who she knows to be a sexual pervert). I will answer assuming you are referring to a woman in the presence of a ghayr-mahram man. The first issue to explore is what is hijab? In current day discussions hijab is a piece of a cloth which a lady will use to cover her hair – so it is a piece of material, another name for headscarf. Similarly, jilbab is the name of cloth which covers a lady's body and niqab is the piece of cloth which veils the lady's face. In the times of revelation and many centuries after, hijab did not mean a piece of cloth used to cover one's head but rather it was a concept. This concept is equally applied to men however as a lady who has asked the question I will answer it according to the demand. However, I felt the need to mention it due to the extreme pressure on Muslim women not to cover and on Muslim male scholars not to be seen as sexist or undermining women or any other accusation which has been blamed on Traditional Islam.

The word itself means screen, curtain, partition and concealment. As a verb it means to conceal oneself or hide from view. According to the Shari'a it means to cover oneself, hide or conceal oneself from the view of non-mahram men – i.e. those men who are not immediate family for instance a father or brother etc.

In Sura al-ahzab Allah discusses the situation regarding the wives of the Prophet when they were visited in order for the Sahaba to either learn hadith or fiqh from them,

And when you ask them (wives of the Prophet) regarding a matter then ask from behind a hijab. (Aya 53)

In fact this verse made hijab compulsory.

And stay within your homes and do not tabarrajna tabarruj al-Jahiliyya al-Ula. And establish Sala and give Zaka and obey Allah and His Messenger. Indeed Allah intends to remove any impurity from you People of the House and to cleanse you. (al-Ahzab: 33)

The word *tabarruj* is defined by the following scholars

Imam Mujahid and Qatada states it means, 'walking in a lewd and seductive manner'.

Imam Muqatil defines it as, 'one who covers her head but leaves her neck and chest uncovered'.

Imam Mubarrad says, 'reveals physical attractiveness'.



Imam Lais states, 'revealing the beauty of her face'.

The Sahabi Abu Umama stated it is the manner in which a woman exhibits her beauty to cause sexual excitement.

Some have argued that these verses are specific to the wives of the Prophet and not to all women. However, there are many ahadith which describe the activity of tabarruj by any woman and its effects.

The most evil of your women are the Mutabar'rijat (those who do at-Tabarruj), the Mutakhayelat (those who strut/swagger); they are the hypocrites. They will not enter Janna except the like of the white legged Crow. (Reported by al-Bayhaqi in his Sunan) – meaning very few as this type of Crow is extremely rare.

Furthermore Imam Ibn Kathir and Imam Abu Bakr Jassas whilst discussing this verse state that if this was the conditions attached to the wives of the Prophet then the common woman has to be even more precautious. Their reasoning is based on the facts that:

- These ladies are of the highest state a woman can be bestowed with.
- They are considered as Mothers of all men of this Umma.
- The men who were talking to them were the Sahaba who were the best of men after the Prophets.
- The discussion was solely about teaching and learning.

If we return to our discussion about the type of cloth a woman would use then we can see a reference of it in sura al-Ahzab, aya 59:

O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to bring down over themselves their jalabib (pl of jilbab). That is more appropriate that they will be recognised and not be abused/disrespected. And Allah all-Forgiving and all-Merciful

Ibn Manzur, author of the encyclopaedic dictionary Lisan al-Arab states that a *jilbab* is an outer sheet which a woman wraps from head to toe. In the Days of Jahiliyya women would walk in public in knee-length skirts and have scarves over their heads.

The view of many, from Sahaba to great scholars, gave the following fatwa. Women should partake in public activity only when necessary. They should not behave in a seductive manner in the presence of ghayr-mahram. When leaving they should wear a cloak which covers them from head to toe and they should lower their gaze – Sayyidina Abdullah Ibn Abbas, Abdullah Ibn Mas'ud, Imam Ibn Hazm, Imam 'Alusi, Imam Ibn Sirin, Imam Ibn Jarir, Imam Suddi and Imam Abu Bakr Jassas.

This method of clothing is sometimes described as 'practical' hijab whereas the concept of hijab can be seen earlier both in the time of the Prophet before its revelation and in the nations before; for instance the daughters of Prophet Shu'ayb who stand away from the male shepherds when they are getting water for their flock and when Prophet Musa is walking back with one of them on Prophet Shu'ayb's invitation.



Based on this the four schools have reached their verdict on the issue of the covering of a lady's face in the presence of ghayr-mahram.

Shafi'i School

According to Imam Ibn Naqib al-Masri there is an agreement amongst the school that a woman is required (Fard) to cover her face in the presence of ghayr-mahram. He states in his book Umdat al-Salik,

Indeed consensus has been recorded upon the prohibition of women leaving their homes with their faces uncovered, indifferent whether there is the likelihood of temptation or not.

This was the view of Imam Nawawi in Rawda a-Talibin in which he quotes Imam al-Haramayn al-Juwayni.

Many of the later shuyukh of the Shafi'i school also adopt this view even though they recognise the awra of a woman in Sala is her body except her hands and face but they include them outside of Sala.

Therefore the agreed view according to the Shafi'i school is that it is compulsory for a woman to cover her face and feet.

Hanafi School

The Hanafi school do not differentiate the awra of a woman in or out of Sala, therefore apart from the hands and the face everything is to be covered. However they consider it wajib to cover the face due to the issue of temptation from the opposite gender even though men are instructed to lower their gaze.

This view is recorded in all the main Hanafi texts – al-Hidaya, al-Bahr al-Ra'iq, Hashiya Ibn Abidin etc.

Therefore the consensus according to the Hanafi school is that due to the obvious attraction that takes place when a man looks towards an attractive woman then it is necessary for a woman to cover her face, with respect to her feet it is compulsory as that is considered awra.

Maliki School

The view originally stated by the Maliki school was similar to the Ahnaf in that all the body is awra except the hands and the face – this is mentioned by al-Karshi in the hashiya of Mukhtasar al-Khalil. Imam Malik did not consider it a problem if a woman dines with her husband in the presence of ghayr-mahram, which clearly means her hands and face would be uncovered, this is also mentioned by al-Hattab in Sharh al-Muwaq. Later jurist Imam Abd al-Wahhab al-Maliki stated that as society had changed due to widespread fitna the need for covering the face had become necessary.



Therefore, the later view is that the face is required to be covered. The feet were considered as part of awra originally.

Hanbali School

The Hanbali view as purported by Ibn Qudama in al-Mughni is that the awra is all the body except the hands and the face. Men are not permitted to look at a ghayr-mahram woman except for a valid legal reason as stated by Imam Ahmad and al-Qadi Abu Ya'la. Many of the later scholars due to fitna changed this position and now regarded it as a requirement for a woman to cover her face.

In summary it seems there is some consensus with respect to the view that the face and hands is not considered as awra and hence necessary to cover from the outset, where as the feet are. If we concede that the face and hands are not awra we have seen with the schools who adopt this view that as society became more degraded and less pious then the issue of fitna or temptation was discussed and as a result the schools' view in terms of covering the face changed to necessary/compulsory to cover. This concept of fitna is described as a time when men do not lower their gaze and look/stare at women to determine their beauty etc. It must be kept in mind that this concept of fitna was discussed around 1000 years ago. A time when there was no internet, no pornography, no satellite channels, no billboards etc. In our current era all this exists and blatant sexualisation and sexual exploitation of women is rampant. This still does not detract from the clear Quranic injunction for both males and females to lower their gaze.

In conclusion due to the context within the 21st century it would be a requirement for a woman to cover her face in the presence of ghayr-mahram. However, out of necessity there will be exceptions for instance when providing testimony as a witness in a court.

والله اعلم و علمه احكم واتم