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Stereotypical Hijab, Oppressive Forces and Postcolonial Muslim Women: A Critical Analysis of *Hijabistan* by Sabyn Javeri

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Abstract

This research highlights the use of the word Hijab and the position of Muslim women in Sabyn Javeri's Hijabistan. This study is significant as Hijab is considered important, sacred and respectful in many religions of the world but is portrayed as a sign of stigma and oppression when associated with Muslim women. It is assumed that Muslim women used to wear Hijab to hide their negative activities. Hence, the Hijab, which is considered a mark of veneration and respect, becomes a scar. The discursive analysis of the delimited text observes how the Hijab becomes a cicatrix for women in Pakistan and why they consider it as a forced, unworthy and unnecessary piece of cloth rather than protective and comfort.

Key Words: Hijabistan, Hijab, Ideology, Muslim Women, Oppression, Scar, Sabyn Javeri

Introduction

Muslim feminism derives its understanding and power from the Qur'an and seeks rights and justice for women and men equally. However, it is misunderstood and misrepresented for its emphasis on Hijab, hence raised hopes and fears. This issue of Hijab is generally raised by both men and women activists. As a dubious subject, this issue has symbolic implications pertinent to the issues of opposition, persecution, imperialism, and phallogentrism instead of being only an object of usage. Despite the stereotypical question marks on the hijabs of Muslim women, its fashion is expanding throughout the world, especially in western countries. The anti-Islamists propagate the proliferation of this Islamic trend as evilness that causes 'Islamophobia'. Most of the women activists slate Hijab as the oppression of phallogentrism on women. They typically highlight such cases of maltreatment of women to pin

down the patriarchal hierarchy and hence feed the anti-Islamic agenda (Grace, p. 1).

Sabyn Javeri is a proficient and nascent writer in the field of Pakistani English literature. She is also working as a professor at Habib University. She is an award-winning short-story writer and authoress of bestselling debut. She has an ardent desire to regain our original inheritance and literary past. She is working on the projects of subcontinent forgotten heroes and discourse related to cultural identity. She portrays a different picture of Hijab and Niqab in her book *Hijabistan* which shows changing concept of Hijab in the eyes of the world. Leila Ahmed is a Harvard scholar who was born in Egypt. Her personal experience parallels some of our time's most significant political and social currents. She challenges current controversies about Muslim dress, as well as basic Western assumptions about Islam, the Muslim world, and women, with a vibrant,

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informed, and provocative response. The theory of Muslim feminism, specifically on Muslim women's dress code and headcover, is used to express the changing meaning of the Hijab in the world. This also demonstrates the ideological concerns of Javeri in life and her philosophical approach regarding religious rules for modesty. One of the main reasons for this changing concept about Hijab is illiteracy or lack of accurate knowledge about the regulations of modesty set by Islam for Muslim women.

Literature Review

This study focused on the word Hijab in Javeri's *Hijabistan* (2019). This signifier has many signified but mostly, it signifies a forced or unwilling infamy of women, especially Muslim women. The signifier consciously and unconsciously presents the Islamic ideology of social hierarchy. Fairclough (1989; 1995) relates the connotation of this ideology with racism, morality, conservatism, liberalism, terrorism and anti-terrorism. Braidotti and Gilligan (1991; 1982) relate it with the stereotypes that establish the patriarchal hegemony. Edward Said (1978) relates it with the European mission that preceded Western cultural hegemony over eastern countries to let the colonizer sabotage the colonized people and lands. One of the tools to present the east as 'other' was the 'cloak' or Hijab. Said highlights this negative depiction of the veiling ladies, for example, as 'in reverse', 'suppressive' and 'mediocre' (Said, p. 34). Grace also indicates that "the veil is central to the discourses of west versus east, democracy versus 'fundamental' Islam, and remains an icon of the otherness of Islam and a symbol of Muslim women's oppression" (p. 12). Cooke (2001), in this regard, highlights the stereotypical image of Islamic Hijab and relates it with colonial discourse(s). Latat R Hasan in *Hindustan Times* (2019) argues: "A young kleptomaniac infuses thrill into her suffocating life by using her abaya to steal lipsticks and flash men." (p. 1) Javeri also endorses this idea and explicates: "It is the idea of a voyeuristic society that is watching from behind the curtain" (p. 1). Javeri, in an interview with Valerie (1993) herself expresses the notion that is described in her different stories: "There are stories here that are inspiring and uplifting but also those that are darker and somewhat sinister, which discuss sexuality, promiscuity and the idea of piety not being

defined by appearance" (p. 1). She argues that people "call out the fact that we put women on a spectrum of good girl and bad girl with no room for in-between ... There is a stereotype of Muslim women out there who wear the hijab, that they will be submissive doormats" (p. 1). She claims to show a different perspective, but she did not meet the ideal situation.

Theoretical Framework

Leila Ahmed indicates "the thesis of the new colonial discourse of Islam centered on women ... Islam was oppressive to women, that the veil ... was the comprehensive backwardness of Islamic society" (p. 152). Veiling was the most striking sign of disparity and mediocrity of Muslim nations from the perspective of the west. Amin and Lord Cromer's assault on veiling caused a counter-assault and rise of an Arabic portrayal relying upon the protection from provincial reasoning. The cover acquired another representative, implying that was the obstruction story. Fanon demonstrates "the Algerians avowed the shroud since custom requested the unbending detachment of the genders and because the occupier was keen on uncovering Algeria" (Studies in a Dying Colonialism, 164). In his suffering and dynamic content, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon turned into a representative of colonized individuals, and his battle motivated the majority to recover their personality. The hidden (veiled) lady ended up being the image of opposition in Pakistan that fueled the feeling of character and autonomy. From this, we get the idea that the veil is not just a garment, but it's a representation of a nation as a separate identity; it is part of the cultural distinction and is also a tool to express the unique identity of the postcolonial state. It also became a symbol of resistance.

Indeed, even today, being affected by both Islamophobia and conservatism, the shroud has acquired an emblematic implying that addresses custom and strict personality in Britain. As Grace specifies: "The cloak is vital to the talks of west versus east, popular government versus 'principal' Islam, and remaining parts a symbol of the otherness of Islam and an image of Muslim ladies' persecution" (Grace 12). In the end, as it is expressed above, there are strict, social, political and sexual orientation events that are powerful in making the causes and tokens of veiling. Before the nineteenth century, the

shroud had significant distinctive importance; it was something that high society ladies wore to show their honor and security by their male accomplices. Toward the finish of the nineteenth century, the shroud represented the mistreatment looked at by Muslim ladies. During Lord Cromer's reign in Egypt, ladies needed to lose the cover so Muslim men could get cultivated; as Ahmed points out, "The custom of veiling and the position of women in Muslim countries became...the proof of the inferiority of Islam... to undermine Muslim religion and society" (Women and Gender in Islam 237). Those thoughts were embraced by the privileged societies who share similar belief systems with the pioneer colonial figures. In any case, that youthful American and Pakistani ladies progressively started to wear cloaks doesn't mean they are fundamentalists. A portion of those is outrageous women's activists. It tends to be presumed that Leila Ahmed handles the issue of the cloak as a picture inside complex chronicled information that remembers the issues of today for sex contemplates.

To conclude, we can say that text mirrors and constructs ideology in it. Ideologies become strong and powerful when they are not apparent. It starts with a fixed research topic or issue and explores the cave of a speaker's or writer's mind, and tries to steal the hidden agenda or invisible ideology like an explorer. Javeri's world is much more liberal and favoring the colonial notion of suppressed Muslim women in the world. This critical analysis will jump into the cave of mind by describing a map that is based on the words of a speaker or writer as rigorously as possible and explores the precious treasure of intention. As soon as the intention is interpreted, the invisible agenda becomes vivid. Moreover, the text is associated with the liberal agenda of shifting the attention of Muslim women from mere dress code to the major things that how they are being suppressed and oppressed by the religion and Muslim society for centuries.

Analysis

The Hijab, also known as the veil, is a recurrent theme in this collection. Sabyan Javeri uses it to dissect the 'Good/Bad Muslim' dichotomy, the prejudices that accompany it (both patriarchal and western), as well as the freedoms offered and curtailed by it. It's

not just a piece of clothing; in these tales, it comes to life and hints at something more. There are inspirational and uplifting stories here, as well as darker and sinister stories about lust, promiscuity, and the concept of piety not being determined by appearance. The darker stories demolish that idea, and many are enraged because no one wants to believe that we're supporting sexism and misogyny inadvertently. The author is claiming that she is a feminist going to rebel against the patriarchal thought of wearing a Hijab and dress code, but she again comes under the pressure of liberal feminism, and she forgot to depict the freedom and choice of a Hijabi girl who feels more comfort and ease by wearing Hijab. She again made it a stereotype and sign of oppression by patriarchal society without noticing the will of Muslim Women. It seems that while writing, she is biased towards Muslim Women and more ignorant about the need, roles, responsibilities and importance of Muslim women in Islam. As Leila Ahmed figures out, the name Zainab al-Ghazali had a strong role in Islamic resurgence and Muslim brotherhood.

It is a book that presents the realism of sexual psychology in all its nuances and pleasures. Language is used as a tool to convey messages. This artwork is with ulterior motives to attract the customers who are liberal one and the one who wore Hijab. Less work done through the words, the more is from the pictorial title. All the subliminal messages are conveyed through the title so that it can be read with curiosity and interest by versatile readers. The cover of the book is exemplifying and uncovering not only the hidden desires of women but an open invitation to all who even never think about the opposite gender like this. This type of caffeine has sexual excitement and is a sign of complete lust object. The text of each is different but revolves around a particular idea. Enlightened, progressive, bold writer's love and the subject of sex are dear to the heart and mind.

Western proponents (they) want to change the scales of nature, there is a dangerous conspiracy to make women more responsible than they can in the name of equality, and most of all, they want to target Muslim women to overturn their veils. And they should be dragged to the streets, bazaars, government offices and every public place. The tendency that already exists between men and

women is becoming stronger, and then in this kind of gender mixing society, the passion emerges within both sexes to become more and more attractive to the opposite sex, while the moral ideology prevails. Don't be embarrassed to do so. On the contrary, if the splendour is considered admirable, then the display of beauty breaks all its limits and even reaches the limit of nudity.

The very first story, *The Date* presents the very negative picture of Hijab and scarf while we see the lines how the affair between a young secretary and an old boss started, so the reason is "it all began with the new scarf" (Javeri, 2019, p. 2). The question raised here why Scarf? It could be anything why she chooses Hijab to convey the idea? That piece of cloth or tightly wounded Hijab is not liked by her as a gift, but she had to wear it to please her boyfriend. 'In this sea of black burkhas, I can't tell who is who' (p.12). In the postcolonial scenario, while these women are going to delineate their true identity by wearing the traditional dress code, Javeri is presenting them as having no identity. The negation of their presence and unrecognition of their identities. That is so typical of the western approach towards colonized societies.

"It all began the day they put the all-encompassing dark garment on me" (Javeri, 2019, p. 14). A strong disgust is found in her tone and voice while she is talking about the headscarf and veil. Though it is the tradition and culture of her area for centuries, she is not willing to accept it. It is quite clear that Javeri is not only rebellious towards religious practices but to the cultural and social norms as well. She claims in the story, "I was older, I must wear a hijab. And an abaya too. They held it to me as if it were a prize" (p.14). In the protagonist's eyes, that is a sign of hostility and antipathy.

"I tried...cloak-like garment that covered me like a tent" (p.14). "I felt hidden ... It was a baggy shuttle cock burkha thrown over our heads, with just a few tiny holes to peer through" (p.14). "The dark material seemed to absorb everything inside it" (p.16). The disdain towards the Hijab is very vivid here. After wearing that Hijab or gown, she is feeling herself someone else the identity of that girl is changed. According to Javeri, Hijab demolishes the identity of a woman and shifts her mind towards

identity issues. As she portrays: "I put the Hijab on me....Not a girl of thirteen, but a dark, mysterious woman. This was someone else, I thought" (p.17). I missed stealing glances at my reflection in shop mirrors and the thrill of getting compliments. (p.17). So she is the one who wants to be a liberal girl ignoring all the conditions set by her society and religions are not important for her but her desires." I had to wear the cumbersome garment. It was a woman's face, I was told...., I was ordered" (p. 18). Javeri wants to promote such an ideology that shatters not only the base of religious regulations but the Pakistani culture and civilization as well. She is portraying Hijabians as they have more opportunities to hide their negative activities. They are privileged as wearing a hijab makes them more pious and pure, so no one assumes that they can do something wrong. "The Hijab is a garment that implies purity. Who would think of looking under it? What would a security guard risk frisk a girl wearing such a holy garment? Why would such a girl steal"? (pp.19-20). Javeri mentions a different perception regarding the Hijab, burkha and abaya in the story by presenting the urges of the protagonist. As we come to know that whenever the protagonist finds out anything attractive, beautiful or tasty, she used her abaya to hide it from the shopkeepers, and even she used this sacred Hijab as a reason for creating anger and rage for others. "My hands itched to grab it and hide it in the folds of my abaya" (p. 21).

Here, we come to know that the author's description of the protagonist's longings changes the way she grew older. Her needs increase day by day, and she is happy to use that abaya to fulfil her desires as she considers it well and good to wear nothing or western style dresses inside her abaya. "We cut off the sleeves of our older shirts and pretended to be wearing western dresses under our abayas." Abaya and Hijab that are worn by the Muslim girls and women because of their own will and choice to cover and protect them have now become the sign of hiding characters' wrongdoings. The main character of the story is so involved in fulfilling her desires and longings that she does not care about society, religion and other things in her life. She just wants to accomplish all her desires through hook or by crook. Therefore, she does not hesitate to flash her abaya to expose her body in front of the shopkeeper through

the balcony. Doing this, she feels some sort of peace and solace. She, the protagonist even do not bother about the family honor and visits the shopkeeper in burkha, but she brushed his hands with her own. Here she wants to fulfil the urge of touching a man. "Sometimes a leg, sometimes a breast, or a wrist, even a flash of my buttocks. We waited for afternoons.....tease him with my urges" (p. 23).

The protagonist has no end to her urges; she made her world under her abaya, and she is the one who made the rules of this world without caring about the rules of society and religion. "Just born and already in hijab thought with a smile". A thing to be hidden from the rest of the world- a man's honor but not his pride (p.27).

Radha or Ruqaiyah Begum conflicts with the family system and bonding of traditional family that is again the culture and civilization of Islam and Pakistan as well. We come to know how the ideologies of imperialism are working secretly to shift the cultural trends and patterns of natives. Her Hijab is to please the Qari Saab, and she is again wrong in her perception here. Her oppression is not because of Islamic principles but because of the individual wrongdoings or deceptive behavior in some of the actions. In the story, we had Hijab a metaphorical meaning. In the next story, the maid and her desires and emotions are presented, which can never be understood and seen by society. She is again using her dupatta and Hijab to create her innocent and pious picture, but actually, she is having the affair with the driver and hiding her sexual activities under the Hijab. In *The Adulteress*, we again find the metaphorical meaning of Hijab where "*Purdah mein rehny do, purdah na uthao*" is delineating the hidden and secretive truths of women's lives and their desires (p.55). The veil here is the veil of darkness and veil between society and the desire and needs of women's lives. In *The Lovers* Aliya living in London has a lot of hate towards head covering and the Hijab she does not want to wear it but is forced by the mother to do so. Here again, the hatred and prejudice of the West against Hijab and Muslim women came into view. We are enlightened here how Javeri is impressed and obsessed with the western approach to see the eastern people. "Her headscarf lopsided as if it had dropped unexpectedly on her head" (p.71). And within that headscarf, she is cheating on her

parents by having an affair with the Hindu boy Ram. *A World without Men* Saira, the veiled one, is shown as a suppressed girl, and the purpose of the Hijab she is wearing is just to cash her beauty; as the narrator states, "your veil draws more attention than a woman in a bikini" (p.87). As the veil is compulsory in Islam but most of the women are feminists and wore the veil as they like to wear, but the picture presented by Javeri in the stories is showing astonishment on the attitude of liking hijab and mocking on the body length veil or Jilbab. She is even a girl who is against the arranged marriage and involved in homosexuality and had so many habits which do not suits her as a Muslim woman.

The Full Stop is again a tome of a near teenager girl who got her periods and wants to celebrate the event. Javeri seems to be very blunt to express the hidden worlds of women living in Pakistan and across the world, talking about their emotions and desires; she forgot to have a focus on the Islamic perspective and cultural differences present between east and west. The authoress is describing the western viewpoint in everything without noticing the dimensions given by eastern culture and Islam. "Like a full stop, this moment in a girl's life put an end to all conversations." *The malady of the heart* "cover your head" (p.130). "This is a strict hijab –observing zone" (p.137). Zara, a married woman, having an extramarital affair and want to be separated from her husband, is again judged by her appearance as she is wearing Hijab and dupatta so she can never be impure or deceptive. Depicting her, Javeri is mocking the cultural beliefs and Islamic perspective of Haya and Pardha. The readers are being told that women in the Hijab and veil had sophisticated, backward and rigid thinking; they do not have a proper aesthetic sense, and they remain to stick to the stereotypical representations of women in society. The character of Ami Jaan and Halima are fine illustrations. "Zara who grew up a steady diet of fear. Fear Allah. He is watching you. Fear the society-people will talk. Keep your mouth shut –even the walls have ears" (p.150). Nasira and her headscarf in *The Hijab and Harare* being mocked by the professor in the US scholarship class. "The professor was mocking her. And more specifically, her headscarf" (p.156). To feel her make small and unimportant, her professor pretends to forget her name. As said contemplates that how

western colonial powers are double oppressing the females of colonized countries showing no respect and value in front of them. Though in some of the stories, we find Javeri tries to unveil or break the tradition of stereotype, but she fails to do that, completely ignoring the need and demands of Pakistani Muslim women.

The narration of Buddhi and Premji is again a story portraying the liberal feministic perspective turning a blind eye towards Islamic feministic and the real Hijab is patriarchy. But she forgot to consider whose agenda is she following by promoting such anti-Islamic and anti-cultural values. The reference to *Aurat march* and its slogans like “Apna khana khud garm kro” (p.164). and the introducing sex toys as *little fellow*..... *Only in London* is a story full of ideas which are supporting the western biased view of eastern religion, customs and practices. The hijab chaddar, the veil, is a sign of hatred and marginalized backward, and ignorant women; with this, the protagonist is expressing her ---- thoughts about the call to prayer. Javeri called them *eventual fundamentalists*. However, in this story, the heroine is also confused about her true identity, and in between British and Pakistani, she has assimilated in the western culture but can never manage her appearance and internal psychological crisis. The thoughts of the mother's instructions catch her interest and make her lament her conduct towards Islam and Pakistani culture.

The Good Wife seems to be a story favoring Muslim women's ideology and liking towards Hijab, but when we go deep down, we come to know that Hijab and veil is the sign or signifier that took disaster in her life and become the reason of her husband death. So the effects shifted from oppression and then to death which is the major issue of wearing a Hijab. Her headscarf becomes the reason for his death, proving him a killer, orthodox and supporter of Jihadi groups. “They either pity me as the poor repressed woman or fear me as a terrorist” (p.199). The hijabians are named *ninjas*, crows, and blackbirds. And the husband questions her, “I want to know why someone so beautiful wants to hide from the rest of the world” (p.200). That headscarf also made the woman a mythical creature, and she is considered an extremist because of her dress code. In the end, when she laments on his death, “it was my

faith that killed him. It was my love of God for which he wanted to prove his worth. I killed him. I am the killer” (p.206). Last but not least narration of *Coach Annie* Hijab is used to cover the shame, to avoid the cleanliness, to hide some bad looks and above all, to secrete the negative sexual activities, it is used to hide the spots, scars and weaknesses of girls. The purpose of wearing a Hijab is again worldly to cover her ugly looks and ugly hair she decided to wear a headscarf. As the narrator delineates, I just preferred cloth to a wig” (p.209). The protagonist here wondered “how slapping a piece of cloth on one’s head could guarantee free entry into the pearly gates” (p.209). She was secluded by the society and mocked by the community.’ *Hijabistan* is about debilitation and hindrance. It takes a gander at ladies sexuality, something that no other (at any rate, not Muslim South Asian) female author has done since Ismat Chughtai's 'The Quilt'. It doubts why we don't regard our women till we desexualize them; why the affirmation of sexuality by the female sex is considered despicable and culpable in our social orders in this manner, the Hijab being referred to here isn't only the actual piece of clothing that shields the body yet the allegorical shroud that is set over female longings. The constrained concealing of ladies sexuality is the Hijab being referred to here. Be that as it may, the topics of force and aspiration and female sexuality are the main force of Javeri’s writings. But all this when viewed by the Islamic viewpoint and cultural perspective than it is not a good choice to choose such topic and scrutinize them by selecting a sensitive topic of Hijab and sexual desires of women. Behind all this, there is a clear agenda to put an end to the Islamic feministic approach and diminish the cultural priorities and dimensions of Pakistan. It is evident here that authoress is conveying all these notions with the western viewpoint and following the patterns of liberal feminism that are not more suitable for Islamic and Pakistani women.

Conclusion

All in all, as is expressed above, there are strict, social, political, and sexual events that are persuasive in making the causes and symbols of veiling. Before the nineteenth century, the cover had significant diverse importance; it was something that privileged ladies

wore to show their honor and security by their male accomplices. Toward the finish of the nineteenth century, the cloak represented the mistreatment looked by Muslim ladies. During Lord Cromer's reign in Egypt, ladies needed to lose the shroud so Muslim men could get socialized, as Ahmed in *Women and Gender in Islam* states, "The custom of veiling and the situation of ladies in Muslim nations turned into... the evidence of the inadequacy of Islam... to sabotage Muslim religion and society" (p.237). Those thoughts were embraced by the privileged societies who share similar belief systems with the pioneer figures. Notwithstanding, that youthful American ladies progressively started to wear shroud doesn't mean

they are fundamentalists. A portion of those is outrageous women's activists. It very well may be inferred that Leila Ahmed handles the issue of cover as a picture inside complex authentic information which remembers the issues of today for sex contemplates. Islamic dress code is not only apparent physical covering as physical law is just mirroring the spiritual need or law for Muslim women. This specific cloak or abaya is the only struggle to meet with the spiritual truth of humanity. The essence behind this dress code is to find the connection and relationship with Allah. Side by side with this, the west seems to be blind to its own markers of oppression and women's control.

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