



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

**THE IRANIAN GOVERNMENT'S APPROACH TOWARDS THE USE OF  
*HIJAB***

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**THE IRANIAN GOVERNMENT'S APPROACH TOWARDS THE USE OF  
*HIJAB***

**By  
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**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies University Putra Malaysia, in  
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of the requirement for the Degree of Master of Science

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By

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**October 2008**

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**Faculty: Human Ecology**

This study has considered the clothing culture of Iranian female and through the first part it will explain the life line of hijab and any possible connection between this Islamic symbol and Iranian dressing culture. In case of declaring the government roles in dressing culture, a considerable attention was paid to the history of Iranian monarchy from Achaemenid up to Qajar and Pahlavi. During the research, the female's dressing, position in monarchy, aristocracy and society, invading Iran by Islam, adapting and converting the Islamic culture to the Iranian version, were all described in details.

The second part of this study is more focused on political aspect of hijab, the history of feminism, the debate about dress code, motherhood and morality, modernization, pre-Islamic revolution atmosphere, Reza Shah Pahlavi's compulsory unveiling and inspiration of global modernization.



The last part of this study is particularly dealing with Islamic revolution and post-revolution era when the hijab suddenly became a matter of state's concern and women were forced again to cover themselves in public. The study also points out that Iran always understood that clothing is a powerful manifestation of political thought and in turn are evidence that the nation adhere to state ideology.

At the end the researcher explains her points of view and emphasises on political perspective of hijab through the conclusion. The main methodological approach of this study is content analysis of documents, books, articles and other materials which conclude the fact that the governments and states attends to instructing the people's privacy and establishing codes for everything even dressing is a dedication of state's interference. The researcher has no doubt and proves that although the Iranian dressing culture might look similar to the hijab, there is no evidence of existing a clothing code of conduct in history which could be referred to hijab or any other Islamic symbol of female appearance.



Abstrak tesis ini dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi sebahagian syarat-syarat untuk penganugerahan Sarjana Sains

**PENDEKATAN KERAJAAN IRAN KE ARAH PENGGUNAAN *HIJAB***

Oleh

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**Oktober 2008**

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Kajian ini telah mengambil kira budaya berpakaian wanita Iran. Bahagian pertama kajian akan menerangkan garis panduan hijab dan kemungkinan hubungan antara simbol keislaman dan budaya berpakaian orang Iran. Bagi mengumumkan peranan kerajaan dalam budaya berpakaian, satu perhatian wajar perlu diambil ke atas sejarah monarki orang Iran bermula dari Achaemenid, Qajar dan Pahlavi. Sewaktu kajian dilakukan, pakaian wanita, kedudukan di dalam monarki, aristokrasi dan masyarakat, pencerobohan Iran oleh Islam, adaptasi dan kemasukan budaya Islam ke dalam versi orang Iran telah dijelaskan dengan mendalam.

Bahagian kedua kajian ini lebih tertumpu kepada aspek politik hijab, sejarah feminisma, perbincangan mengenai kod berpakaian, keibuan dan moraliti, modernisasi, atmosfera revolusi pra-Islam, kewajipan membuka tudung oleh Reza Shah Palavi dan inspirasi global modernisasi.



Bahagian terakhir kajian ini secara khususnya berkaitan dengan revolusi Islam dan era sebelum revolusi apabila hijab secara tiba-tiba menjadi perhatian negara dan wanita telah dipaksa untuk menutup diri mereka ketika berada di khalayak awam. Kajian turut mendapati bahawa negara Iran memahami bahawa berpakaian merupakan satu manifestasi politik dan terdapat bukti yang menunjukkan bahawa bangsa menyokong ideologi negara.

Pada akhir kajian, pengkaji menjelaskan pandangannya dan menekankan kepada perspektif politik ke atas pemakaian hijab melalui kesimpulan yang dilakukan. Kaedah utama yang digunakan di dalam kajian ini meliputi analisis dokumen, buku, artikel dan bahan-bahan lain termasuk fakta bahawa kerajaan dan negara terlibat dalam mengarah hak individu dan membentuk peraturan untuk semua perkara, ini termasuklah cara berpakaian, yang mana ia merupakan campurtangan negara. Pengkaji tanpa ragu-ragu dan membuktikan bahawa walaupun budaya berpakaian mempunyai persamaan dengan hijab, tidak terdapat kewujudan arahan kod berpakaian dalam sebarang undang-undang yang boleh menjadi rujukan kepada hijab atau simbol keislaman dalam penampilan wanita.

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I certify that an Examination Committee has met on **date of viva voce** to conduct the final examination of **Sara Javadi Faraz** on her Master thesis entitle “ The history and the politics of the hijab (veil) in Iran “ in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher degree) Regulations 1981. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Master of Science.

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## **DECLARATION**

I declare that the thesis is my original work except for quotations and citation which have been duly acknowledgment. I also declare that it has not been previously, and is not concurrently, submitted for any other degree at university Putra Malaysia or at any other institution.

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**SARA JAVADI FARAZ**

Date: 12 February 2009



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>PAGE</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	ii
<b>ABSTRAK</b>	iv
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	vi
<b>APPROVAL</b>	vii
<b>DECLARATION</b>	ix
<b>LIST OF PLATES</b>	xiii

### CHAPTER

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1.	Briefcase	1
1.2	Research questions	2
1.3	Objectives of the study	3
1.4	Scope and importance of the study	3
1.5	Methodology	4
	1.5.1 Secondary documents	5
	1.5.2 Publications	5
	1.5.3 Newspapers and articles	5
1.6	Limitation of the Study	5
1.7	Organization of the Study	7

#### 2 LITRATURE REVIEW

2.1	Introduction	9
2.2	Hijab or veiling	9
	2.2.1 Veiling in Iran	10
2.3	Studies about the Iranian hijab	18
2.4	Clothing	24
	2.4.1 Clothing in the Median and Achaemenid periods	24
	2.4.2 The Arsacid period	25
	2.4.3 The Sasanian period	25
	2.4.4 Period of the Iranian tribes on the Pontic Steppes and the Caucasus	26
	2.4.5 The Period of the Scythians and related peoples	27
	2.4.6 The Omayyad period	27
	2.4.7 The early 'Abbasid period	28
	2.4.8 The Saljuq and post-Saljuq periods	29
	2.4.9 The Mongol and Timurid periods	31
	2.4.10 The Safavid period	32



	2.4.11	The Afsharid and Zand periods	33
	2.4.12	The Qajar period	34
2.5		Iranian women and veiling during the Pahlavi period	36
2.6		Passed laws In Pahlavi's period regarding the dress code in Iran	40
	2.6.1	Bases which considered dress code as a crime in Pahlavi's government	42
2.7		Conclusion	45
<b>3</b>		<b>FEMINIST VIEWS OF THE HIJAB</b>	
	3.1	Introduction	47
	3.2	Feminism	47
	3.3	Feminism in Iran and debates about women's dress code	49
	3.4	Coexistence of modernity and traditionalism in pre-revolutionary Iran	53
	3.5	Motherhood and women's morality	56
	3.6	The impact of compulsory hijab on women's lives	60
	3.7	Women's resistance towards patriarchal culture	62
	3.8	Modernisation discourse on women and request for identity	67
	3.9	Conclusion	69
<b>4</b>		<b>ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN'S APPROACH TOWARDS THE HIJAB</b>	
	4.1	Introduction	72
	4.2	Hijab in Islam	72
	4.3	Texts implicating the value and purpose to the use of hijab	73
	4.3.1	Quran	73
	4.3.2	Hadith	74
	4.4	Scholar's view on hijab question	76
	4.5	The Islamic revolution (1979)	78
	4.6	Observing the hijab in government offices	79
	4.7	Observing the hijab in private companies	85
	4.8	Passed laws after the Revolution about dress code in Iran	86
	4.9	Hijab in post-revolutionary Iran	92
	4.10	Conclusion	105
<b>5</b>		<b>CONCLUSION</b>	
	5.1	Preamble	108
	5.2	Summary of major finding	108



5.3	Conclusion	113
5.4	Recommendation for future studies	116
<b>REFERENECES</b>		118
<b>BIODATA OF THE STUDENT</b>		123



## LIST OF PLATE

Plate	Page
2.1	12
2.2	12
2.3	44
2.4	44
3.1	71
3.2	71
4.1	77
4.2	82
4.3	82
4.4	103
4.5	103
4.6	104
4.7	104



# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Briefcase

To veil, or not to veil? This has been the question that Iranians have debated for over a century. At one time, decrees of Iranian governments have required the use of hijab (Islamic veil) and at the other times forbidden it. Merchants have refused to do business with veiled or unveiled women, and officials of public transportation have declined to service women based on whether they wear the veil or do not. Many have fervently spoken for or against the veil. In fact, veiling has functioned more like a code that allowed everyone to vent their private aspirations, fears, dreams and nightmares. Now, the veil as an emblem of progress, then domination, and later as a symbol of purity, then of corruption, has accommodated itself to a puzzling diversity of personal and political ideologies.

Today's older women in Iran were veiled by tradition, forcefully unveiled by government's edict in 1936, and obligatorily veiled in 1983 again. In other words, the actual wearing of the veil has been imposed, withdrawn, and imposed again within a single lifetime. It is hard to imagine a more heavily charged symbol than the veil in the modern history of Iran (Milani, 1992:41).

The issue of veiling for women has always been important for the Revolutionary leaders of Iran. Although, the laws have been relaxed or tightened at different times, they have



been never revised or abandoned completely. In spite of being a sensitive subject in Iran, hijab has been little studied, even after the Islamic Revolution. Despite this, comprehensive studies about hijab in Iran in general, and about the Iranian government's approach towards hijab after the revolution, have been generally lacking. Therefore, there are many questions that remained unclear and need to be answered.

This research examines the use of hijab in contemporary Iran and feminist's views regarding it. The study will also examine women's clothing in the different periods of Iranian history, comparing the use of hijab before, during, and after the Islamic Revolution, and establish a contrast between the literature written by Muslim feminists and the perception of other informants.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

The primary objective of this research is to understand the changing values of the Iranian government towards hijab before and after the Islamic Revolution of Iran. Specifically, the study attempts to determine the following:

- a. what is the background of hijab in Iran before Islamic Republic Revolution, and has it been considered a breach of women's rights?
- b. How has the evolution of the Iranian women's clothing been in different historical periods?
- c. What are the passed laws before and after revolution about women's dress code in Iran?
- d. How has the presence of jurisprudential consensus over hijab been in Iran?
- e. How has the Iranian government's approach towards hijab changed?



### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

- i. To evaluate the history of Iranian women's clothing In Pahlavi's regime and explaining the reasons of enforcing them to unveil their hijab
- ii. To determine the political and moral aspects of Islamic revolution and explaining the different codes of conduct such as hijab and bi hijabi
- iii. To examine the participle of new dressing culture and hijab as a great political impact and symbol of post-Islamic revolution

### **1.4 Scope and importance of the Study**

The importance of this research is based on categorizing different sections and parts like a brief explanation about the historical background of clothing culture in Iran regarding the female part of the society. Then it will move forward to the current century and spreading the subject to the theory of feminist which is one the most remarkable aspect of 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Considering the feminist movement and activities in Iran would take this study to analysing the effects on developing the Iranian women's behaviour and also changing their expectation of the society. Meanwhile the response of different government to these movements and desires is another part of the importance of this study. This study will imply how and under what circumstances the feminist theory and also the female dressing became a matter of state concern and rules and regulations were established to direct this issue as they wish.

hijab, as an official and Islamic symbol has been considered throughout this study. It is utterly important to understand the hijab, its effects on society, the impacts and complexities it has caused. To discover what made one government to force women go unveil and the other one encouraged them to cover themselves, this study went through minor details of Islamic policies, secularism, feminist and also the human rights. Thereafter, researcher had paid great attention to moral issues which have been used by different rulers in Iran in case of taking advantage of the clothing culture.

Less than a century ago, the Iranian women were forced to remove their veil in public and disobeying was punished harshly and surprisingly three decades ago, after the Islamic revolution they had to wear it again. This up and down seems to be more politically rather than socially and the researcher of this study, as an Iranian female, who inherited a compulsory dressing culture after the Islamic revolution at 1979 in Iran, believes the necessity and importance of studying the Reza Shah Pahlavi era when hijab was a matter of dishonour and the era of Islamic state when a woman without hijab has been called a disgrace one.

### **1.5 Methodology**

The history and the politics of the hijab in Iran, contains many academic disciplines such as feminism, anthropology, sociology, history, and Middle East and Islamic studies. Each chapter use one or more of these disciplines. The main methodological approach of this study is content analysis of documents.



Content analysis is a research tool used to determine the presence of certain words or concepts within texts or sets of texts. Researchers quantify and analyze the presence, meanings and relationships of such words and concepts, then make inferences about the messages within the texts, the writer(s), the audience, and even the culture and time of which these are a part. Texts can be defined broadly as books, book chapters, essays, interviews, discussions, newspaper headlines and articles, historical documents, speeches.

### **1.5.1 Secondary Documents**

Islamic punishment law, passed laws as well as circulars and statements as a secondary data has been used to explain the penalties of incorrect women's clothing in Iran before and after revolution.

### **1.5.2 Publications**

Published documents in the form of studies such as books, thesis and articles in journals were also referred to.

### **1.5.3 Newspapers and Journal articles**

For the major part, the main methodological approach of this study was historical and the analysis was based mainly on secondary data and documents. This study relied heavily on books pertaining to the history of hijab in Iran before and after revolution for better understanding about this important issue is the eyes of Iran's governments in different periods. There are, however, certain disadvantages with this approach, but with limited access to and the general paucity of documents and written works on Iran,

the choice of this approach is still preferable and most probably practical to reasonably accomplish the task set out in the current study.

### **1.6 Limitations of the Study**

Throughout this study the researcher came across two distinguish limitations. Firstly, it seems that the hijab, as an Islamic symbol for the females, is not a fundamental debate in most of Islamic societies. In another word, hijab has been accepted by majority of Muslim women in those countries which are not Shiite. However, Iran as the only Shiite country in the Muslim world has different interpretation of hijab and takes it very seriously and politically. Although the researcher was keen on analysing hijab as an Islamic code of conduct, her study was focused on Iran and Iranian women rather than a general issue.

Secondly, it is important to emphasize that researching on the Iranian politics and policies, under the new republican government which had passed by its early revolutionary phase, is not an easy job to do. Therefore, interview has been avoided in this research because of the possibility of arresting the interviewee and the interviewer. Also interview should always be based on the reality and reality comes from the freedom of speech. Unfortunately, Iranian people are not comfortable about expressing themselves or explaining their opinions about matters which could cause them great danger or harm. As a result, this method, interview, could not be trusted in case of hijab.

After almost three decades of governing Iran by the Islamic republicans, hijab and everything regarded to female part of society has been turned to a major Taboo which could block any attempt to analysing it even in close cycles and families. So, finding good resources were a matter of difficulty for the researcher in this study.

### **1.7 Organization of the Study**

This study is divided into five parts. Chapter 1 presents a brief introduction and importance of the study. It provides the basic approach, identifying research questions and objectives as well as methods of the study while outlining its organization.

In the second chapter, Literature Review, veil and veiling in Iran are defined and discussed. The history of the hijab in different Iranian governments, from Safavids to Reza Shah Pahlavi's reign and his policy of Kashf-e-hijab (banning the hijab in public) and Passed laws In Pahlavi's period regarding the dress code in Iran, up to the Islamic Revolution are provided.

The third chapter, The Feminists Views of the hijab, includes feminism theory, feminism in Iran and debates about women's dress code, coexistence of modernity and traditionalism in pre-revolutionary Iran, women's acceptance of the hijab, motherhood and women's morality, fundamental concepts used for the imposition of the hijab in post-revolutionary Iran, the impact of compulsory hijab on women's lives, and women's resistance against the patriarchal culture.

The fourth chapter analyzes the Islamic Republic of Iran's approach towards the hijab. It discusses the hijab in Islam, holy Quran and Hadith, scholar's views on hijab question, The Islamic revolution in 1979 and the policy of compulsory veiling, hijab in post-revolutionary Iran and how it change within government- reformist- and conservative-dominated states.

The conclusion of the study is given in chapter five, where the summary of major findings, main conclusion and analysis and recommendation for future studies are outlined.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide a review of literature relevant to the study. The chapter discusses veiling as well as the history of women's clothing in different historical periods up to the Islamic Revolution in 1979 and passed laws regarding to dress code in Iran in Pahlavi's Period.

#### 2.2 Hijab or veiling

In using the word 'hijab', researcher has relied primarily on the definition given in The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World, namely that its linguistic employment is as a noun referring to a 'cover, wrap, curtain, veil, screen, [or] partition. When 'hijab' is used in a Qur'anic context, it also carries connotations of separating the sacred from the mundane. However it is important to note that in the contemporary Muslim vernacular 'hijab' is used interchangeably to refer to:

- A simple headscarf;
- The entire ensemble a woman wears in front of non-intimates that cover her whole body - with the exception of her face, hands and for some, feet - in loose, opaque, non-distinctive clothing.
- The philosophy of dressing and acting modestly. (Oxford Encyclopedia, 1999:108)

The veil takes its meaning from different situations, times, and places and therefore has no single fixed importance. To cite one extreme example, among the Tuareg tribe of North Africa, men veil themselves as an expression of status and power. In the west, the veil is usually associated with the face veil that was worn by the Goddess, particularly in

her Crone aspect, which represented future fate. Her Celtic name of Caillech meant “veiled one”. (Milani 1992:19)

The ancients believed that a peek behind the veil often meant a view of one’s own death, which was why a Goddess’s hidden face was dreaded and thought deadly, like the face of Athene-Gorgo, or Medusa. According to the Goddess’s inscription on the temple at Sais, “No man has ever lifted the veil that covers me.” As much as people earnestly desired a look into the future, they also feared what it might reveal.

Veils were also formerly worn by widows in expression of their Crone character. It was said that the veil was to protect the woman from attack from the ghost world, whence her spouse had gone. Then, brides were veiled, because at a transitory stage in life they were thought especially vulnerable to evil influences. Nuns, on the other hand, were veiled to conceal their sexuality. (Milani 1992:43)

### **2.2.1 Veiling in Iran**

Chador, the form of veiling prevalent in Iran, is an all-enveloping piece of cloth that covers a woman from head to toe. The word itself means tent, perhaps in reference to the earlier, pre-Islamic practice of moving women around in covered sedan chairs. (Plate. 2.1 and 2.2)

Much debate and disagreement surround the origins of veiling. Part of this confusion can be attributed to the treatment of women in Iranian history. Iranian history has not allocated much attention and space to women’s lives in general, let alone their veiling.





Yet, despite this paucity of historical evidence, many have argued with unfounded conviction and passion about the origin of veiling. (Mehrizi in *A modern practical analysis of the hijab in contemporary society*, Akbari in *Hijab*, Jamshidi in *History of hijab in Islam*) Some assign of it to an aristocratic Zoroastrian habit, (Elaine Sciolino<sup>1</sup>) while others think that Islam first imposed and then perpetuated the practice. (Mosavi in *Hijab and Islam*, naghip poor in *Islam and women*) These conjectural arguments, interesting as they might be, shed little light on the present practice of veiling. The fact remains that veiling, whether or not originated in Iran, accompanied the Islamic faith, or came earlier, still holds extraordinary appeal for many Iranians.

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<sup>1</sup> The Islamic Republic didn't invent the veil, of course. Even before the advent of Islam, the practice of veiling probably existed among the Zoroastrians. From the 16th century on, a kind of all-enveloping Islamic veil was worn, although it was not black and its style varied according to region. (*Persian Mirrors: The Elusive Face of Iran* : p. 36)

