

# The politics of the hijab

Literature, Russian Literature



## The Politics of the Hijab of the Gender and Sexual Studies of the Concerned March 21, The Politics of the Hijab Summary

Simply speaking, attire or clothing is not a sterile thing that is merely used to cover the body against the natural elements. Clothing is also a medium of ideological identification and a means of asserting and affiliating to a social identity.

In that context Hijab tends to be the most politicized apparel in both the Western and Muslim world. While the Muslim world interprets it as female rebellion against the Western hegemony, the West interprets it as a symbol of patriarchal dominance. Actually speaking, both these assumptions are wrong. Though Canada is constitutionally and professedly a multicultural nation that supports religious and cultural diversity, actually speaking Canada is not that tolerant of the religious rights of minority communities. In that context Hijab relates to the assertion of political, cultural and gender identity in a Canadian context.

The young Muslim women in Canada see Hijab as an umbilical cord that ties them to their culture and endows them with community acceptance and sustenance, as they move out in the larger Canadian society to eke out their identity at their own terms. Hijab allows women to deny the patriarchal practices typical to their culture of origin while allowing them to solicit familial and community support as they adapt to the Western way of life. Many young Canadian Muslim women also use Hijab to assert their cultural identity in a society dominated by majority norms and as an expression of their religious piety, modesty and political beliefs. Thereby, Hijab is not a monolithic symbol of patriarchal oppression, but carries a range of meanings

and implications.

### Analysis

The expression “ appearances are deceiving” does aptly describe the politics behind the wearing of head scarf by the young Muslim women.

It is true that Hijab is used as a way of oppressing women in many totalitarian Muslim nations (Lazreg, 2009). Yet, using this fact to assign a singular meaning related to patriarchal dominance to Hijab is unjust and wrong (Elver, 2012). Many a times some sections of the majority community in Canada associate simplistically derogatory meanings with Hijab, not because they care about women rights, but because the Hijab stands out as a potent symbol of a minority culture and identity. It sounds really modern to use the ploy of women rights, while demeaning a symbol of minority identity and religion (Scott, 2007).

There are also sections of the majority community who do genuinely believe that the Hijab worn by the young Muslim women in Canada conveys their surrender before the patriarchal domination. This is actually a gross misconception. For many young Muslim women in Canada, Hijab is a thing that keeps them linked to the essential goodness in their culture as they move ahead and adapt to the Western way of life. In that context Hijab is a source of vitality and strength that flows out to the young Muslim women from their culture and community (Nieuwkerk, 2006). It is their way of asserting their identity in a society that is practically oriented around the majority beliefs and values.

### References

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