

[Home](http://theladiesfinger.com) (<http://theladiesfinger.com>) [News](http://theladiesfinger.com/category/news/) (<http://theladiesfinger.com/category/news/>)

[Home](http://theladiesfinger.com) (<http://theladiesfinger.com>) [Life](http://theladiesfinger.com/category/life/) (<http://theladiesfinger.com/category/life/>) [Longform](http://theladiesfinger.com/category/longform/) (<http://theladiesfinger.com/category/longform/>) [Life](http://theladiesfinger.com/category/life/) [Health](http://theladiesfinger.com/category/health/) (<http://theladiesfinger.com/category/health/>) [Search](#)

Three Years Ago I Decided to Wear the Hijab All the Time, and Everyone Lost It

[Kranti](http://theladiesfinger.com/category/kranti/) (<http://theladiesfinger.com/category/kranti/>) [Vaanthi](http://theladiesfinger.com/category/vaanthi/) (<http://theladiesfinger.com/category/vaanthi/>)

[August 24, 2016](http://theladiesfinger.com/wearing-hijab/) (<http://theladiesfinger.com/wearing-hijab/>)

By [The Fak](http://theladiesfinger.com/category/the-fak/) (<http://theladiesfinger.com/category/the-fak/>) [About](#)



Photo via Pinterest

Here's a striking scene in the Pakistani serial *Shanakht*. A mother and daughter stand facing each other. The mother is confronting her daughter and berating her for something. That something is also very interesting, but the visual is spectacular. The mother is dressed in modern clothes – a long tunic and loose pants, very elegant and fashionable. Her hair is stylishly cut short. The daughter is dressed in a salwar kameez, and her hair and head are firmly covered by a brightly coloured hijab. The mother is chiding her daughter for being so 'backward' and regressive in choosing to wear the hijab.

Being a young Indian Muslim woman, there is very little I can relate to among all the numerous cultural productions in our country and abroad. But this one scene sang to my heart. Not least because I found myself in a very similar situation three years ago, when I announced my own decision to wear the rida (a kind of hijab that members of a small sect of Shiite Muslims wear) full time.

Trending

Sorry. No data so far.

Subscribe to our email newsletter!

Name

Email Address*

[Subscribe](#)

You May Also Like

[After Payal Tadvi's Death Can We Allow Medical Education to Continue to Pretend to be Casteless?](#)

May 28, 2019

[Jokha Alharthi's Man Booker Win Reminds Us of Oman's Recent Slave-owning Past](#)

May 24, 2019

I grew up in a social milieu where wearing the veil full time at a relatively young age was considered unnecessary and needlessly conservative. While I was growing up, the women around me did not wear the veil full time (although now, they do), just when going to the mosque or for religious occasions. My family is religious, but our piety didn't really need to spill onto our choice of clothes. I knew this. And therefore, choosing to wear the veil full time was a mighty struggle for me. For me, the veil wasn't just an article of clothing. Wearing the veil at some places and not at others was a contradictory act that unsteadied my sense of a unified identity. I have known people who wear the hijab outside the mosque, but don't observe it rigidly in wearing it every day no matter what the occasion. But the hijab was almost ideological for me, representing not only my faith but a way of life that I subscribed to, and a whole set of beliefs and principles, which sprung from the realisation that I didn't need to bend against my faith in order to achieve worldly success.

I was always religious. I was never the kind of person who wanted to "experiment", mostly because of my faith. But there were pressures, even if vicarious. For instance, when I'd firmly refuse something that went against religion, such as say going out to clubs and pubs, I would still feel odd and out of place. There was the uncomfortable inkling that the people around me wouldn't take me to be cool enough, not the fun, adventurous kind of girl but just the dull, pious sort. I felt the pressure to present myself as a fun girl but necessarily within a framework of my beliefs that was, understandably, arbitrary for others. The veil then began to feel like something that could, at a glance, say that I was pious and there were certain things I would not do, but that did not really mean I was dull and uninteresting.

However, when my conviction to wear the hijab grew strong, I found myself in the midst of two opposing pulls in my life. On the one side there was the path of religion and a lifestyle suited to my beliefs. But then there was also my other life, on the other side, where lay my career and all those things that kept me interested in the world. For people I knew, and what I knew of how the world worked, these two sides were irreconcilable.

At least, that's what I thought. So, I delayed. I dilly-dallied. I wanted to wear the veil permanently long before I actually took the decision, but I was scared. As I was growing up, my family didn't force me to start wearing the hijab full time. After the school uniform, I picked up jeans to wear to college like it was the most natural thing to do. I went to college dressed in western apparel, and if I switched to wearing hijab, just like that? What would my friends say? How would I explain? For I certainly would have to explain and I didn't want to do the explanations. I didn't know what to say in the face of numerous questions I knew to expect – why so suddenly? Is someone forcing you? Why are you doing this to yourself? And then again, what would the more modern and western of my kin say? I was afraid of their dismissals, their scorn for going just the opposite way when the world was all moving 'forward'.

There were days when I thought it was a good idea that I was postponing. I wasn't anxious when I met my family, and I wasn't nervous when they introduced me to friends. However I came across to them, awkward, shy and reserved that I was, at least I wasn't also dubbed "traditional" by virtue of my conforming (in terms of the social class I belonged to) attire: jeans. Those were harmless personality traits. Being perceived conservative and traditional however, was not something you wanted when you were a young college going person. You were supposed to be funky, spunky and "free", open to experiencing life in its various vicissitudes. If you bound yourself with tradition, wilfully, you were restraining yourself, bafflingly denying yourself of what the world was apparently offering to young people.

[In Avengers: Endgame, Black Widow is Sexy, Sterile and So Burnt By Marvel](#)

May 12, 2019

[Let Us Admit the Sins of Atishi Marlena](#)

May 10, 2019

[20 Questions for SC Panel that Cleared the CJI of Sexual Harassment Charges](#)

May 9, 2019



(<https://www.flickr.com/photos/hernanpc/16036681031>).

Photo by Hernan Pinera via Flickr/CC BY-SA 2.0

But my growing conviction pricked at my conscience. I knew what my heart wanted to do, and I was denying myself my own satisfaction and peace. So, in what was an impulsive decision but not really, after I finished graduation and saw to a neat closure one chapter of my life, I took to wearing the veil full time. Just like that.

Of course, I knew wearing the veil would not be a minor change in the way I lived. When I informed my family and friends about my decision to wear the hijab all the time (and not just when going to the mosque, the way I was used to), the disbelief and shock my announcement was met with was bemusing to say the least. I was regarded with a strange mixture of awe and worry. There was also a certain repulsion that I could sense, and a distancing that suggested I was being amazingly regressive. Everyone was appalled. Partly because I didn't actually tell anyone I was thinking about wearing it, or that I had started wearing it. I just showed up one day, wearing it, and explained to my friends and family this would be how I would dress up henceforth.

For several people, wearing the hijab, covering up is a kind of negating of the self. When I told my 90-plus-year-old grand-aunt, she said I shouldn't do it, that I should enjoy myself, that it was too soon. I have never been more surprised.

Other people thought I was being too religious too soon. There is always the general perspective that the stage of life when one is supposed to leave the material world and focus on religion, should come towards the end of one's life, not at the start. The time before that is meant to be enjoyed.

A western lifestyle is more often than not looked at as liberating. In order to be at the forefront and ahead with what people constantly keep referring to as "the times", we must, apparently, look at the West. When one thinks of the word modern in general terms, it more often than not leads us to think of ideas and lifestyles that are fundamentally inspired by the West. Foremost being, lifestyle. And when one talks about the modern Indian woman living in the city, a veiled Muslim woman is not the first thing that comes to mind. Our lifestyles are starkly opposed to what is generally perceived to be modern, urban ways of living life, one that includes going out for concerts, to clubs and to bars for drinks after work.

What is western does not automatically make it modern, as we know. In the period when I was delaying and doing a bit of Hamlet-like weighing my options and chances about donning the veil, I have never felt more constricted and unfree.

There was a girl I knew when I was in college who, looking back now, seems to have gone through a similar process about the veil that I did. I saw her progressing from wearing jeans to the more modest and traditional salwar kameezes to, finally, wearing the veil. Knowing her all through this progression, I was surprised at how she seemed to look most beautiful when she had started and grown comfortable with wearing the veil. She seemed so confident, happy and so motivated.

I took courage from her (but not only her), and also from my own conviction.

Choosing to wear the veil even when most everyone around me who was my age did not, has been the most liberating decision I ever made. But it has not always been all good and wonderful. As an obviously Muslim woman wearing the hijab, I am made to be different. I am separated from the crowd and that is not always a good thing. I feel left out and alienated, pushed away from the centre and told that the rules don't apply to me. And then there is always the preconception of my being nothing but a traditional, meek and docile woman to smash everywhere I go. For, nobody would take me to be a modern urban independent woman, because I would look and dress a certain way.

Modernity does not comprise of one narrative. It cannot direct us from one set of ideas, beliefs and lifestyles to another that are dubbed "better" by writers who originate from this second set. If my clothes are covering and hiding, that in itself does not make them regressive. For me, they are modern, because they represent an active choosing and a betterment in my life, a moving forward. For me, moving from western apparel to wearing something so starkly opposite to it, and the bend of mind that was traced along this shift, was progress. It was liberation.

Tasneem likes to travel, swim, read and write. You can find her on Twitter @tasneemsworld05.

Share! Tweet Like 470  Share

Save ([https://www.pinterest.com/pin/create/button/?guid=YqKB5iT8MfXN-1&url=http://content%2Fuploads%2F2016%2F08%2Fb53d36a3fee7e7af14ab4237b0a7ea66.jpg&description=Three%20Ye%20The%20Ladi](https://www.pinterest.com/pin/create/button/?guid=YqKB5iT8MfXN-1&url=http://www.pinterest.com/pin/create/button/?guid=YqKB5iT8MfXN-1&url=http://content%2Fuploads%2F2016%2F08%2Fb53d36a3fee7e7af14ab4237b0a7ea66.jpg&description=Three%20Ye%20The%20Ladi))

ladiesfinger

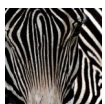
About the author (<http://theladiesfinger.com/author/ladiesfinger/>)

Related Posts



[\(http://theladiesfinger.com/2019-elections-kuchh-karo-na/\)](http://theladiesfinger.com/2019-elections-kuchh-karo-na/)
[\(http://theladiesfinger.com/2019-elections-kuchh-karo-na/\)](http://theladiesfinger.com/2019-elections-kuchh-karo-na/)

[A Funny Thing Happened On the Way To My Mumbai Polling Booth Yesterday.](#)



[\(http://theladiesfinger.com/i-am-a-queer-feminist-killjoy-and-am-grateful-for-metoo-in-india/\)](http://theladiesfinger.com/i-am-a-queer-feminist-killjoy-and-am-grateful-for-metoo-in-india/)
[\(http://theladiesfinger.com/i-am-a-queer-feminist-killjoy-and-am-grateful-for-metoo-in-india/\)](http://theladiesfinger.com/i-am-a-queer-feminist-killjoy-and-am-grateful-for-metoo-in-india/)

[I Wish I'd Known When I Was Younger that I Didn't Have to be One of the Boys](http://theladiesfinger.com/i-wish-id-known-when-i-was-younger-that-i-didnt-have-to-be-)
[\(http://theladiesfinger.com/i-wish-id-known-when-i-was-younger-that-i-didnt-have-to-be-](http://theladiesfinger.com/i-wish-id-known-when-i-was-younger-that-i-didnt-have-to-be-)



(<http://theladiesfinger.com/i-wish-id-known-when-i-was-younger-that-i-didnt-have-to-be-one-of-the-boys/>).

[one-of-the-boys/](http://theladiesfinger.com/i-wish-id-known-when-i-was-younger-that-i-didnt-have-to-be-one-of-the-boys/)



(<http://theladiesfinger.com/sexual-harassment-cell-attempt-fail-media/>).

[I Tried to Set up a Anti-Sexual Harassment Cell at a Media House and They Thought I Was](http://theladiesfinger.com/sexual-harassment-cell-attempt-fail-media/)

[a Troublemaker](http://theladiesfinger.com/sexual-harassment-cell-attempt-fail-media/) (<http://theladiesfinger.com/sexual-harassment-cell-attempt-fail-media/>).

7 Responses to “Three Years Ago I Decided to Wear the Hijab All the Time, and Everyone Lost It”



[Reply](#)

NidaZ

August 24, 2016 at 12:10 pm (<http://theladiesfinger.com/wearing-hijab/#comment-3387>).

Interesting and empowering read.

The only fear that keeps human beings follow their hearts is their vulnerability owing to the outer world. Once we learn the art to maintain the equilibrium required to achieve peace, which is the balancing act between the inner and outer world, everything falls into a very nice place.



[Reply](#)

TassuBhanpurwala

August 24, 2016 at 6:54 pm (<http://theladiesfinger.com/wearing-hijab/#comment-3389>).

I am so proud you wrote this :*



[Reply](#)

runkinrun

August 25, 2016 at 1:50 pm (<http://theladiesfinger.com/wearing-hijab/#comment-3390>).

Hi Tasneem

This is a pretty awesome read and yes I do think in many ways we tend to generalize and not look at a person for who they are but through just one lens – the veil in your case..

But i wanted to mention, while your experience is absolutely a valid, there is the other side.. which is that millions of muslim women have faced through centuries of rampant patriarchy, disrespect and unequal treatment.. and for them and others the veil is a symbol of that terrible tragedy and violent oppression .. and so when that very symbol becomes liberating for you personally (now in opposition to the other equally powerful consumerist culture) – it basically confuses people ..

the question remains that can one symbol of oppression become a symbol of liberation (for you yes) but in general ? specially when there continues to be millions of women who are forced to wear the veil or forced to confirm to some form of religion ..

so ya in the end probably what both sides is understanding – that for every one person like you – there are many more who are denied the choice of wearing clothes .. and for me to accept that yes even the veil can be liberatin for some !



[Reply](#)

tasneemsworld05

[August 25, 2016 at 7:16 pm \(http://theladiesfinger.com/wearing-hijab/#comment-3391\)](http://theladiesfinger.com/wearing-hijab/#comment-3391)
runkinrun runkinrun Thank you for being so nice and respectful. Yes, if you talk about the Islamic veil it can be oppressive – but the keyword here is choice. And this works but ways I think, whether it is someone asking you to wear it or asking you to remove it (like what recently happened with the burkini in France).

If you view the veil as being symbolic of patriarchy, disrespect and inequality, would you not still be working within the framework of a very western ideology? One that suggests that the religion and its followers are backward moving, not modern and progressive, because they still want women to dress a certain way. The thing is, while other forms of purdah (like it is practiced in some Hindu communities) may be a more cultural than religious practice, the hijab is decidedly religious. Which is also where it gets more complicated.

So to answer your question of whether the veil can be symbolic of both, I think the veil shouldn't be viewed out of context as a symbol of anything. The factors around it (for instance, the freedom to choose) that inform the decision (or lack of) of wearing it will determine whether the veil, or anything else, is oppressive or not. 😊



[Reply](#)

tasneemsworld05

[August 25, 2016 at 7:16 pm \(http://theladiesfinger.com/wearing-hijab/#comment-3392\)](http://theladiesfinger.com/wearing-hijab/#comment-3392)
TassuBhanpurwala 😊 <3



[Reply](#)

tasneemsworld05

[August 25, 2016 at 7:17 pm \(http://theladiesfinger.com/wearing-hijab/#comment-3393\)](http://theladiesfinger.com/wearing-hijab/#comment-3393)
NidaZ Yes, I agree 😊



[Reply](#)

Md Tajammul Khateeb

[August 30, 2016 at 7:38 pm \(http://theladiesfinger.com/wearing-hijab/#comment-3401\)](http://theladiesfinger.com/wearing-hijab/#comment-3401)
That's the right approach! Brilliantly written!

Leave a Reply

Comment

Name (required)

E-mail (required)

Website

23+72 (required)



THE LADIES FINGER!

Online Bachchi, Dil Ki Sachchi

Come on over for feminist journalism.

Politics. Pop Culture. Health. Sex. Law.
Books. Work.

We write what we want to read.

[Terms & Conditions](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Refund Policy](#)

[About](#)

[Contact Us](#)

Subscribe to our email newsletter!

Name

Email Address

*

Subscribe

Trending

Sorry. No data so far.

Keep up with us!



[.http://facebook.com/theladiesfinger](http://facebook.com/theladiesfinger)



[.http://twitter.com/theladiesfinger](http://twitter.com/theladiesfinger)



[.https://www.youtube.com/user/fingerzine](https://www.youtube.com/user/fingerzine)



[.mailto: fingerzine AT gmail DOT
com](mailto:fingerzine AT gmail DOT com)