

Hijab, A Scientific View

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Article

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Hijab or the Islamic modest dress that covers natural contours of body and spots of beauty has several beneficial aspects that are commonly known. Being the divine command which is obligatory for the followers of Islam, the Muslims, both males and females must observe Islamic modest dress code. In this short article, the scientific aspects of *hijab* will be discussed briefly.

First of all, let us briefly analyze the verses of Qur'an where Allah commands believers, both males and females to observe certain codes of conduct in their lives:

﴿ قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ ۖ ذَٰلِكَ أَزْكَىٰ لَهُمْ ۖ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ ۝ ﴾

Say to the believing men that they cast down their looks and guard their private parts; that is purer for them; surely Allah is Aware of what they do. [24:30]

﴿ وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا ۖ وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَىٰ جُيُوبِهِنَّ ۖ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا لِبُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَائِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَائِهِنَّ أَوْ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِي إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِي أَخَوَاتِهِنَّ أَوْ نِسَائِهِنَّ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُنَّ أَوْ التَّابِعِينَ غَيْرِ أُولِي الْإِرْبَةِ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ أَوِ الطِّفْلِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يَظْهَرُوا عَلَىٰ عَوْرَاتِ النِّسَاءِ ۖ وَلَا يَضْرِبْنَ بِأَرْجُلِهِنَّ لِيُعْلَمَ مَا يُخْفِينَ مِنْ زِينَتِهِنَّ ۖ وَتَوْبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ ۖ جَمِيعًا أَيُّهَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ۝ ﴾

And say to the believing women that they cast down their looks and guard their private parts and do not display their ornaments except what appears thereof, and let them wear their head-coverings over their bosoms, and not display their ornaments except to their husbands or their fathers, or the fathers of their husbands, or their sons, or the sons of their husbands, or their brothers, or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or those whom their right hands possess, or the male servants not having need (of women), or the children who have not attained knowledge of what is hidden of women; and let them not strike their feet so that what they hide of their ornaments may be known; and turn to Allah all of you, O believers! so that you may be successful. [24:31]

In these verses, Allah commands following [as underlined]:

1) For both believing men and women: Cast down their looks and guard their private parts

2) For believing women:

A) Not to display their ornaments (with exceptions).

B) Not strike their feet unless their ornaments become known

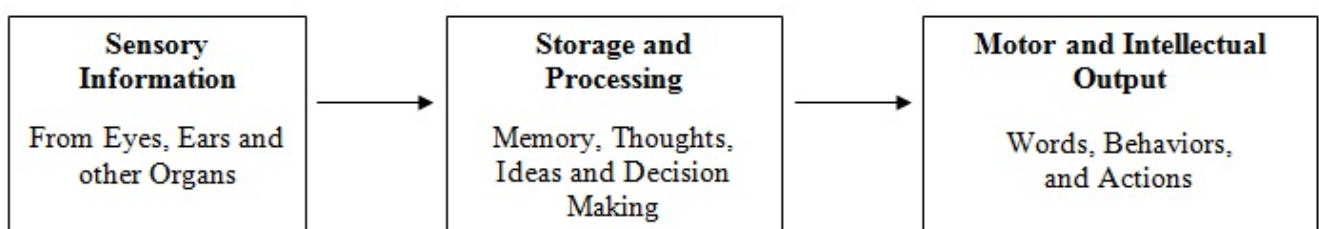
‘Casting down their looks’ is one of the common command for both men and women and in addition women are shouldn’t ‘display’ their ornaments. What this has to do with the command of *hijab* ? What could be possible implications of ‘keeping down’ one’s look while living in society where everyone doesn’t observe a modest dress code ? Let us look at it from scientific angle.

Human nervous system is the divinely made computer with over 100 billion neurons. These neurons are like highly sophisticated microchips and scientists have failed so far to calculate exact storage capacity and processing speed of even a single neuron.

Brain receives its inputs via sensory modalities, such as eyes, ears, smell, taste, touch etc. This information is then stored, processed in different areas of brain that are connected together and form the basis of further thought processes, development of new ideas, decision making and the physical actions, or outputs. Thus input to the brain usually matches with its output. The most striking point is that over 80% of all the sensory information that goes into the human brain comes from eyes only.

Thus, controlling the input of sensory stimuli from eyes can significantly affect the overall functioning and subsequent tasks such as memory, analysis of stored information, thought processing, learning, emotional and social aspects related to received information, carried out by the nervous system.

A major task of neurons is to store and process all the information in appropriate areas of brain and make it ready for accurate and timely retrieval in future. Finally, the output which is seen in the form of words, behavior, and physical actions, is dependent on the previous step. Thus, if wrong or incorrect sensory stimuli enter into brain, the neurons will be storing and processing that information, leading to bad ideas, thoughts and finally bad words and actions. A simple model of it is presented in figure below:



A simplified Model of Brain Function

Thus, when an environment has abundance of provocative stimuli, especially from the visual system, i.e. eyes, this leads to relevant aggressive and provocative words, behaviors and actions. Vulnerable individuals, and young and immature minds that lack appropriate training and self-control, and cannot handle the sensory information going into their brains, are automatically prone to give similar output in the form words, behavior and actions that correlate with sensory input.

For example, kids or adolescents who watch movies with violence or play video games with similar themes, indulge into to similar type of aggressive and uncontrolled behavior.

In today's world, the sensory information mostly enter eyes via special environmental scenes at parties, in universities, at gatherings, interaction of males and females at work place and in other situations, and exposure to media, cinema etc, pictures, magazines, TV and computer screen, iPod and mobile phone screen, and other such gadgets.

Unless a person blocks the unwanted information from going into his brain by controlling his eyes and where he looks, or selectively deciding not to expose oneself to a specific environment, the information cannot be prevented from entering brain.

This is much more difficult in a society where no modest dress code exists or where liberal culture prevails, leading to a bombardment of sensory stimuli to brain every day. In this situation, the only way for the males and females to protect their thoughts from getting corrupted is to control their gaze.

Additionally, the females can block provocative sensory stimuli entering into a male's brain by wearing an unprovocative, loose and simple dress that perfectly hides body contour and spots of beauty, adopting a modest and decent behavior and minimum social interaction that wouldn't lead to unwanted emotional or social consequences.

Scientific data on aggression and sexual violence against girls and women in Western societies is a common norm and it is accepted as such to be a part of the Western culture. By the age of 21, almost 98% of women suffer from some form of sexual aggression in US, Europe and other liberal societies.

These societies have adapted themselves to this injustice and degradation against women which is considered to be a part of their lives. There are special centers to deal with sexual violence and treat those who suffer on day to day basis and there are emergency phone numbers available to deal with immediate situations, if the victim needs medical and emotional support. Assistance is also provided to the girls and women who have suffered from sexual violence by NGOs or various governmental organizations.

However, these societies have failed to deal with the basic issue outlined earlier in this article which is controlling the environmental stimuli that lead to these crimes against women in the form of output. Islamic dress code for women and Islamic teachings about controlling one's gaze act as powerful filters to protect brain from being exposed to provocative stimuli and keep it protected from getting corrupted

by blocking all subsequent steps mentioned earlier. Thus, the brain doesn't store bad and provocative stimuli in the form of memory, doesn't process bad thoughts and ideas and doesn't develop any unwanted emotional and social attachments. Accordingly, the output is seen in the form of controlled, logical and good words, behaviors and actions.

Perhaps, this is the reason that Qur'anic verses dealing with *hijab* or Islamic dress code mention the consequences of such actions [looking down and protecting oneself] lead to purity for believing men. And for believing women [by not displaying their ornaments, observing prescribed dress code and thus protecting themselves] and men it is eternal success because most of the provocative stimuli come from the females. Truly a society can become eternally successful, safe for women and pure for both men and women if Islamic dress code and Islamic teachings for decent behavior are observed.

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (as) said: 'Whenever the eye looks at something forbidden, a knot of desire is tied in the person's heart, and that knot will only be untied by one of two conditions: either by weeping out of grief or regret in true repentance, or by taking possession of what one desired and looked at.'

Certainly several crimes and illegal actions against women can be prevented if eyes don't look at what is unlawfully exposed in the name of liberalism, modernity and fashion to be seen, provoking lust among males and if women realize that observing Islamic modest dress is in their own interest and for their protection.

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