

# Ethics of Reflexive Spirituality: The Question of Hijaab

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**Abstract:** *This paper examines Islamic ethical teachings on modesty and decency through the instrumentality of Hijaab for Muslim women. The aim is to reconceptualize religious ethical teachings which provide a moral platform that enhances societal growth and development. Adopting the analytical, descriptive and evaluative methodology, the paper reveals that Hijaab dress is a reflection of modesty and decency in dress pattern and attitude which reflexes spirituality on both genders. It states further that the ethic of decency through the wearing of Hijaab enhances restraint from emotional sexual thought that could lead to promiscuity, sexual harassment and rape. The work recommends concerted effort towards the teachings and re-emphasizing of Islamic religious ethics which help to reduce moral laxity in the society. For a society with high scientific and technological development without corresponding moral values emphasis and adherence is doomed for destruction. The paper finally submits that a balanced society would be achieved when both Arts and Science disciplines flourished in tandem, and that any attempt to relegate one at the expense of the other could spell negative consequences that are detrimental to achieving optimum development for the society.*

**Keywords:** Ethics, Modesty, Reflexive and Hijaab

## 1. Introduction

Newton's third law of motion states that "behind every action there is equal and opposite reaction" (Okeke, Okeke and Akande, 2011:118). This law is not only true of scientific enquiry, but also true of social reality. Social realities center on human being and the immediate ecology. Human beings being the nature of what they are possess rationality that makes them distinct from the class of higher organisms. They possess a higher consciousness that makes them display organized behavioral pattern which enables them to live well and develop in the society. The rational feature in human beings enables them reflect on anything their senses perceive which in turns affects their behavioral pattern either positively or negatively. Therefore, what the senses perceive especially the sight sense, goes a long way to produce a long lasting effect. If the object of perception is appealing, the mind tends to desire it. The scenario has moral consequences depending on the motive behind it. Certain aspects of human anatomy tend to provoke emotional sensibility when expose to sight. The Creator God has made human beings male and female and their physiological components naturally operate in an attractive reciprocal basis. It is the moral values which have it source from the Creator God that regulates the activities of human beings in relation to their sexes. Moral values could be jettisoned through a negative response to what the senses perceive. Therefore, modesty and decency in behavioral pattern and dressing is sacrosanct for a healthy societal life.

Over the years the issue of dressing has received a lot of attention in our nation Nigeria. Beginning from the homes to the Universities of higher learning and to the National Assembly (Muyi, 2008:17), the issue has being a subject of concern. The tenets of the dominants religions in Nigeria (Africa Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity) frown at the ugly attitude of indecent dressing because of its negative consequences. This paper takes a look at the issue through the instrumentality of

Islamic ethical teachings with a particular emphasis on Hijaab recommended by the Qur'an. The paper argues that the Islamic ethical teaching on Hijaab wearing enhances restraint from emotional sexual thought that could lead to promiscuity, sexual harassment and rape, and that both sexes stand to benefit with regards to modesty and chastity which enhance spirituality in religious pity and moral sanctity of the society which invariably facilitates harmony that promotes growth and development of the society.

## 2. Theoretical Framework: Theory of Perception

Perception is the process of gaining consciousness of an object. It is one of the means of valid knowledge in the world and it consists in an inseparable relation of the perceptive consciousness with its content (Swami in his book *The Philosophy of Life* in [www.swami-krishnananda.org](http://www.swami-krishnananda.org) retrieved 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 2016). For perception to take place there is a transmission of vibration from the object, which human consciousness comes in contact with and that becomes the content of consciousness which invariably makes someone to know the existence of the external object. This perception is caused according to Swami, by the operations of a mind whose existence as a mediator between the Atman (eternal self) within, and the object outside is possible from the synthesis of sensations. There is also the possibility of an absence of perception at certain times. Thus, the mind is the connecting link between the Atman (eternal self) and the sense organs. Through the existence of the internal organ (the mind), perception and non-perception take place. The mind according to this theory is with parts and move in time and space. It is capable of moving from place to place and can assume the forms of the objects of perception. In other words, the radiant of the mind goes out through the eye or any other sense-organ to a place where an object is, and gets transformed into the shape of that object. Swami analyzes the apparatus of perception in his book *Sure Ways of Success in Life* in the following

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ways. The senses are the gatekeepers of the wonderful factory of the mind. They bring into the mental factory, matter for manufacture. Light vibrations, sound vibrations, sight vibrations and the like, are brought inside through these avenues. The sensations are first converted into percepts by the mind, which then presents these percepts to the intellect. The intellect converts these percepts into concepts or ideas. Just as ordinary clay mixed and treated with plaster of Paris, passes through settling tanks and is made into jugs, jars, plates, cups etc, so also mere light vibrations, sound vibrations, sight vibrations etc are turned into powerful ideas or concepts of various description in the factory of the mind. The mind thereafter gives an order based on what is transmitted to it and the external organs of the body carry out the order. This theoretical analysis lends credence to our earlier proposal that what the human eye sees or views is capable of having an effect in our attitudinal behavior.

### 3. Concept of Islamic Ethics

Islamic ethics is generally referred in Arabic as akhlaq (the plural of Khuluq) which stands for character, nature and disposition. The word akhlaq tends to have a close connection with Khaliq (the Creator) and Makhluq (the creature). This is evident in Qur'an 68:4 which says "And verily, you (O Muhammad) are on an exalted (standard of) character". Rahim, (2013:508) defines akhlaq or character as the state of the soul which determines human actions. It is neither the soul nor the action. In further differentiation of character and action, character represents the internal and hidden state of the soul, while action is its outward manifestation. Thus, character (akhlaq) is the inward cause while action is its outward consequences. This character according to Rahim (2013:508) could be acquired through training and practice. A good character therefore produces good action and the opposite holds true as well. Islamic scholars have made a tremendous input on the interrelationship between akhlaq or the state of the soul and human action. Prominent among them is Al-Farabi (d. 950) who defines Islamic ethics (akhlaq) in his work *Fusul* cited in Rahim (2013:508), as a science which studies the state of human soul. Apart from al-Farabi, Ibn Miskawayh (d. 1030) equally made an attempt. In his work *Tahzid al-Akhlaq*, the scholar defines akhlaq as "a state of the soul which causes it to perform its actions without thought or deliberation". Other scholars such as al-Ghazali (d. 1111), Fakhruddin al-Razi (d. 1209), al-Tusi (d.1274), and al-Dawani (d.1502) expanded further the definition of akhlaq as the science of the human soul (Muhammad, 2003:4-6). They refer to it as the science of the human soul which defines the characteristics and qualities of the soul as well as the methods of how to control and moderate them (Muhammad, 2003:5 cited in Rahim 2013:508).

In his analysis, Al-Ghazali pointed out that man consists of two forms, khalq and khuluq or akhlaq. According to him, khalq refers to the physical forms of mankind while khuluq or akhlaq refers to the spiritual form of mankind. Therefore, akhlaq from al-Ghazali's view is rooted in the soul and manifested through man's actions. Good soul will produce right action and bad soul produces wrong actions.

He thereafter defined Islamic ethics which is equally represented in Arabic as ilm al-akhlaq, as the way to acquire the well being of the soul and to guard it against the vices. In addition, it is also a study of certain religious beliefs and of rightness or wrongness of actions for the purpose of practice, and not for mere knowledge sake. He summarized his analysis by saying that, the study of akhlaq includes the study of right actions towards God, family members and society (Muhammad, 1983:22). Ibn Taymiyyah on his own part averred that Islamic ethics or ilm al-akhlaq is a science that seeks to know which actions should be done and which should be avoided. To him, it is a practical science meant to be applied (Hovanniasian, 1983:11). From the preceding analysis we could infer that Islamic ethics is a science that deals with the maintenance of virtues through the avoidance of wrongdoing and the practice or doing of what is right and desirable. This conceptual clarification of Islamic ethics has placed us in a better footing to understand the focus of this work which deals on Hijaab wearing as an ethic of restraint from vices. It is important to mention at this juncture that Islamic ethics is but a numerous, comprehensive and far reaching subject in the sense that it deals with the relationship between man and God on the one hand, and man and his fellow men on the other hand, including man and other creatures of the universe and lastly, man with his innermost self.

### 4. Concept of Immodesty in Dress Pattern

What is today regarded as indecent dressing is a product of fashion. Generally, fashion is a human activity. It is an effect of culture change and global civilization. Every cultural heritage has a distinctive dress pattern with which such culture is identified and recognized. Cambridge Online Dictionary of English defines fashion as a style that is popular at a particular time, especially in clothes, hair, make-up, etc. To be fashion conscious according to Igboin (2010:221) is to be trendy, that is being current with the latest fashions and following them. Thus, immodest or indecent dressing arose from trendy fashion. The trendy fashion is historically traced to the period when women put on night duty dresses with the intention of gaining attraction from the opposite sex or prospective suitors (Igboin, 2010:222). It was solely a night and secret affairs and not done during the day. However, with the passage of time, trendy fashion became a broad day activities. The trend gives rise to all manner of fashionable dresses otherwise known as sexy and killer dresses that are worn by women and ladies in our society. The ugly trend has crept and stuck into the minds of our female folk to the extent that it now become a new way of life, almost obliterating the religious values previously attached to modesty and those who do not embrace it fully, try to adjust their adornments to suit the new style.

What actually makes a dressing pattern indecent? Or what constitutes an immodest or indecent dressing? It is simply any form or kind of dressing that exposes the sensitive parts of the body such as the breasts, the chest region, stomach curve, buttocks and thighs which inflame passion and sexual feelings from the sight perception of the opposite sex. Academic institutions in Nigeria, where this

ugly incident thrives most have considered indecent dressing as:

such fashionable outfits as mini-skirts, low-slung revealing the navel, see-thru blouses, non-use of bra, bikini, hot-pants, micro-mini-skirts, spaghetti, sleeveless blouses, fish skirts, monostrap, palazzo pants, hipsters, silted pants, halter neck, triangle tops, scrappy top necks, number tops, cupy tops, bell bottom, patra, lakra, tight fitting jeans, body-hugs, show-me-your-chest, strapless, wicked straps, tubes, show-me-your-belly, party wear, beach wear, show-me-your-breast and others that expose the cleavage of the body (Igboin and Awoniyi, 2006:21).

Offices in Government Ministries and Parastatals are not left out in the trendy fashion. The attempt made by some State Houses of Assembly in recent past to enact law forbidding nudity and indecency in government quarters and offices is a testimony that the place has also become a fertile ground for trendy fashion campaign. The failed attempt by Ogun and Abia State Houses of Assembly to enact the law is case in point (Adeninyi, 2005 cited in Igboin, 2010:223).

Religious bodies have also made tremendous effort in combating the social ills of indecent dressing which is fast becoming a worrisome attitude in places of worship. The Editorial of the Nation Newspaper captures the annual August meeting of the Igbo women of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) whose theme focuses on indecent dressing among women. Although trendy fashion is not rampant in Mosques but it is not uncommon to find some female Muslims especially the youth who tend to be influenced by the trend in putting on tight covering that reveals sensitive part of their body which provokes attraction to the prying eyes. This is a deviation from what was originally prescribed by the Quran and the tradition of the Prophet. The essence of the above conceptualization is that the incidents of rape and sexual harassment of women which debases the values of women, have been variously traced to the corollary effect of indecent or immodest dress pattern that arouses sexual urge from the sight perception of the male folk; a natural phenomenon base on the theory of perception.

## 5. The Hijaab Question

The concept of modesty in Islam prescribes a distinct mobility and interaction protocols for both genders but with particular emphasis on women (Maududi, 1991 cited in Syed and Ali 2005:6). The essence of the prescription is to ensure humility and restraint in dress, conversation and dealings between men and women who are not related to each other. Modesty is embedded in the institution of sexual segregation which are supported by the traditional sources of the Islamic law. The major rationale put forward by religious scholars in support of modesty is to curb "sexual anarchy" prevalent in the world (Doi, 1989 cited in Syed and Ali, 2005:5). The Qur'an (the word of God) and the Hadith (the tradition of Prophet Muhammad) which are the traditional sources of Islamic thought, provide the impetus in highlighting the essence of modesty for women. The verses are Qur'an 24:31 and 33:59.

And tell the believing women to lower their gaze (from looking at forbidden things), and protect their private parts (from illegal sexual acts) and not to show off their adornment except that which is apparent (like both eyes for necessity to see the way or outer palms of hands or one eye or dress like veil, gloves, head cover, apron), and to draw their veils all over their bosoms and not to reveals their adornment except to their husbands, or their fathers, or their husband's father, or their sons, or their husband's sons, or their brothers or their brother's sons, or their sister's sons, or their (Muslim) women (i.e. their sisters in Islam), or the (female) slaves whom their right hands possess, or old male servants who lack vigor, or small children who have no sense of feminine sex. And let them not stamp their feet so as to reveal what they hide of their adornment. And all of you beg Allah to forgive you all, O believers, that you may be successful (Quran 24:31).

The verse above represents a definition of a specific code of conduct for Muslim to maintain and guard their modesty in terms of eye contact, dress, ornamentation and walking style. They are required to lower their gaze as a first step to guard their sexual attraction. They are also required to desist from showing their adornments except to the extent of that which appears by uncontrolled factors such as through wind blowing their clothes. And their head cover should be drawn so as to cover their hair, the neck and the bosom. In another verse, the Quran enjoins women to use an outer garment while going out of their houses.

O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks (outer garments) all over their bodies. That will be better that they should be known (as free respectable women) so as not to be annoyed. And Allah is ever forgiving, most merciful (Quran 33:59).

The above quoted verses provide the etymology of Islam concept of Hijaab. The word is from the Arabic term "hajaba" which means to hide from view or conceal ([www.islamswomen.com/hijab/hijab](http://www.islamswomen.com/hijab/hijab) retrieved 11th March, 2015). The outer garment or cloaks refers above combine to inform the ideological base of Hijaab indicating women's covering. Some orthodox scholars take the word to mean a veil which may also cover the face (Hussain, 1987 cited in Syed and Ali 2005:6).

Historically, the issue of women's covering is not peculiar to Islam alone. Scholars have argued that long before Islam came in the 7<sup>th</sup> century (610CE), there had been a practice of women's covering. Hoodfar (2003) cited in <http://arabsinamerica.unc.edu/identity/veiling/history-of-the-hijab>, stated that the first reference to veiling or covering dated back to the Assyrian text in 13 B.C. in which the practice of veiling was an exclusive reserved for elite and respectable women alone. The poor or women of lower-classes were absolutely forbidden from it. In a similar way, the scholar equally revealed that the elite women in ancient Greeco-Roman, pre-Islamic Iranian and Byzantine societies practiced veiling system. A critical look at what the scholar claimed above shows that veiling in the ancient world was a matter of social status for

women and not religiously based. However, the Islamic religious practice of Hijaab wearing or women's covering is a command from God through Prophet Muhammad to believers (Muslim women) in the faith. "O Prophet, tell your wives and daughters and believing women..." (Qur'an 33:59). The injunction has attracted different interpretations. Some say it refers to the Prophet wives alone in order to distinguish them from other women while some liberalists consider it a matter of choice. The truth of the egalitarian teachings of Islam is that whatever was commanded to the wives of the Prophet as virtuous acts are equally expected of other Muslim women. The debate is not the objective of this work rather the concern here is to prove that women's covering through the instrumentality of Hijaab is an ethics which enhances spirituality.

## 6. Hijaab as an Ethics of Reflexive Spirituality

The term spirituality is not just a Christian concept alone. It found expression in Islam through the major languages of the Muslim world especially Arabic and Persian languages. *Ruhaniyyah* is the Arabic term while *ma'nawiyat* is the Persian term. Both terms are of Arabic origin. The first is derived from the word *ruh*, meaning spirit in which the Quran instructs the Prophet to say, when he was asked about the nature of spirit, "The *Ruh* (the spirit) is one of the things, the knowledge of which is only with my Lord. And of knowledge, you (mankind) have been given only a little" (Qur'an, 17:85). The second derives from the word *ma'na*, which literally means inwardness, "real" as opposed to "apparent", and also "spirit" which is understood traditionally to mean higher level of reality than both the material and the psychic that directly relates to the Divine Reality Itself (Seyyed, 1991: xvii).

There is another dimension of spirituality inherent in Islamic languages. This is obvious in the continuous presence of the *barakah*, or the grace that flows in the vein of the universe and within the life of man to the extent that he dedicates himself to God. In this regard, there exist a sense of moral perfection and beauty of the Soul as far as human beings are concerned. In addition, there is a feeling which brings about the recollection of God and the paradisaical world when ideas, sounds, words and in general objects and works of arts are involved. In all these instances, Seyyed (1991: xvii) concludes that the term spirituality evokes in the Muslim mind a closeness to God.

Reflexive spirituality is coined from the word *reflex*. The Cambridge Online Dictionary of English defines the word "reflex" as a physical reaction to something that one cannot control. Reflex action entails something someone does when reacting to a situation without thinking. A reflexive action therefore, is an action that affects the person or thing that causes the action. That is, the effect of the action, attitude and behavior of someone, returns back to the person. Thus, reflexive spirituality is the spiritual attitude of a person which refrains evil being done to the person. This means that the action or attitude of a person reflexes back to the person by way of protecting and

sustaining the spiritual standing of that person. What these emphasis means as regard this paper is that the attitude of modesty and decency in dress pattern as prescribe by Islamic ethics through Hijaab (women's covering) is a spirituality that reflexes. This implies that the wearing of Hijaab which covers women's body prevents emotional sexual thought that could lead to sexual immorality. Emotional sexual thought being the root drive to sexual harassment of women and rape which debase women's spirituality is prevented when the ethics of *hijaab* is adhered to and this in turns enhances and sustains the spiritual standing of the modest woman.

## 7. Evaluation and Conclusion

The contemporary society is saddled with all sort of immorality as a result of shift or neglect of values inherent in religious ethical practices. There is in the society the triumph of scientific and technological development which has contributed towards the advancement of man in the world of mammals. This developmental drive has made successive policies to be channeled toward the science and technical disciplines with less emphasis on arts and humanities, the disciplines concerned with providing understanding for life, its physical and spiritual dimensions. Suffice it to say, the arts and humanities disciplines have their focus on the understanding of man in relation to his socio-cultural environment; the essence of existence, with life as a continuum between the spiritual and the physical, the seen or visible and the invisible or unseen (Falaiye, 2014:14). It is pertinent to mention that morality is of essence as far as human living is concerned. A morally derailed society with advancement in science and technology heads towards doom and destruction. Contemporary trend in fashion that has ushered in all sorts of dressings otherwise considered as indecent dressings from moral point of view which digress the values of covering especially the sensitive parts of the body to exposing it, poses grave challenges to the virtues and values of religious ethics and morality. The high rate of sexual harassment, promiscuity and rape in the society today is a corollary effect of all manners of indecent dressing prevalent in the society. The moral education through religious ethical teachings that would have sharpen and nurture the human mind towards right living according to the divine will of the Creator God which guarantee peace in life and life after is gradually been relegated. The ethics of covering for women through the instrumentality of Hijaab hewed from Islamic religious practices according to the injunction of the Holy Qur'an and the tradition of the Prophet (pub) which act as shield to sexual emotional drives need to be revitalized. The essence according to Maududi (1991), an eminent religious scholar is that the male is aggressive by nature, and if something attracts him, he has a natural urge to acquire it. Agreeing with this scholar, it stand therefore that the attitude of modesty and decency in dress pattern of women through *hijaab* wearing not only prevents sexual attraction but also enhances the spiritual standing of the woman who obeys God's command as she will be free from being groped, an act that leads to debasement. The men are equally helped to maintain their spiritual standing with God as their sexual aggressive nature as posited by

Maududi is curtailed. This justifies Newton's third law of motion we earlier stated in this work that ,in every action there is equal and opposite reaction. Therefore, there is the need to continuously conscientize the human minds through the teachings and emphasis on Islamic religious ethics on the part of the Muslims to help reduce the moral laxity in the society. The current crisis in Osun State as a result of the court ruling on Muslim female students to put on Hijaab would have been uncouth for, if the spiritual import of Hijaab wearing had been understood by both the Muslims and the Christians and the general public. A society that places emphasis on scientific and technological development with less emphasis on arts and humanities that focus on moral and spiritual well-being of man stands the risk of self-destruction. It is our submission that a balanced society would be achieved when both Arts and Science disciplines flourished in tandem, and that any attempt to relegate one at the expense of the other could spell negative consequences that are detrimental to achieving optimum development for the society.

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