

THE SCHOLAR

Islamic Academic Research Journal

ISSN: 2413-7480 (Print Version) | 2617-4308 (Online Version)

DOI: 10.29370/siarj

Bi-Annual

Print & Online

ḤAYĀ (MODESTY) AS A MORAL VALUE IN ISLAM: ITS RELEVANCE AND CHALLENGES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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📖 How to Cite This Article

Arijo, Zain-ul-Abdin, and Jabeen Bhutto. "ḤAYĀ (MODESTY) AS A MORAL VALUE IN ISLAM: ITS RELEVANCE AND CHALLENGES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY." The Scholar Islamic Academic Research Journal 12, no. 1 (March 2026).



Indexing: DOAJ – Directory of Open Access Journals |



Registration: Crossref

VOLUME
12

ISSUE
1

PAGES
46-74

ARTICLE DOI Click to open

<https://doi.org/10.29370/siarj/issue22ar3>

Web: <https://siarj.com>

Language: English



RECEIVED
17 Nov 2025



ACCEPTED
04 Mar 2026



PUBLISHED
23 Mar 2026

Publisher

Research Gateway Institute

Sindh, Pakistan

OPEN ACCESS

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ḤAYĀ (MODESTY) AS A MORAL VALUE IN ISLAM: ITS RELEVANCE AND CHALLENGES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

Zain -ul- Abdin Arijo, Jabeen Bhutto

ABSTRACT:

This paper examines the idea of Ḥayā (modesty) within the Islamic religious context and its application within the modern social context. Based on the Quran and Hadith, Ḥayā is an all-encompassing moral value that influences an individual's character and social conduct. The study emphasizes the role of modesty not just in the physical appearance but also in humility, restraining oneself, and ethical behavior. In the contemporary age of globalization, secularism, and the impact of digital, the tradition of Ḥayā is challenged greatly, with issues such as cultural pressures, media influence, and misconceptions. The paper also analyzes how modesty can be used to maintain moral integrity and social harmony and its interplay with contemporary concepts like feminism and individualism. It concludes that in spite of changing social conventions, Ḥayā is a very important and applicable value in maintaining dignity, identity, and moral balance in individual and community life.

KEYWORDS: Ḥayā, Modesty, Islam, Qur'an, Hadith, Moral Values, Contemporary Society, Globalization, Ethics, Islamic Teachings

1. Introduction

Definition of Ḥayā

Ḥayā, often translated as "modesty" or "shyness," is a fundamental concept in Islam that goes beyond mere physical appearance or behavior. It is an ethical virtue that includes a feeling of decency, moral restraint and a

profound respect to oneself and others. It is based on the Arabic word root, ḥ-y-', which signifies to be ashamed or to act modestly. As an element of the Islamic world, Ḥayā is not merely the modest conduct but also the ethical character of the individual demonstrating his/her humility and respect to his/her dignity, as well as the Islamic ethical principles. It is considered to be the necessary part of the life of a Muslim which affects personal and social behavior.

According to the Quran and the Hadith, which are the main sources of Islamic teachings, Ḥayā has become one of the most important qualities because it helps to determine the personal behavior and relations with others. The idea of Ḥayā is well entrenched in the Islamic ideology that people are responsible to Allah about what they do and that modesty is a sign of what one is doing according to the divine commandments. This verse highlights the relationship between self-control and modesty and spiritual purity as stated in the Qur'an:

قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ
ذَلِكَ أَزْكَى لَهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ

"Say to the believing men, that they should lower their gaze and guard their private parts. That is purer to them. Indeed Allah is Aware of what they do.¹

Importance in Islam

Hayat in the Muslim religion is a sign of great faith (Iman). Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) once said:

إِنَّ لِكُلِّ دِينٍ خُلُقًا، وَإِنَّ خُلُقَ الْإِسْلَامِ الْحَيَاءُ

¹ Qur'an, 24:30.

"Each religion has a distinctive feature, and the distinctive feature of Islam is modesty (Ibn Majah).²

This hadith emphasizes the focus of Ḥayā to the essence of a Muslim, and it implies that it is not a cultural or social convention rather it is a characteristic of Islamic morality. The significance of Ḥayā is also reflected in the fact that it goes beyond the individual level and applies to socialization, family, and life in the community.

Modesty in Islam is not merely relating to physical appearance but has a strong connection with inner traits like humility, integrity and sincerity. It promotes the kind and respectful action of Muslims, who should not be arrogant, proud or boastful of wealth. With the help of Ḥayah, an individual is able to live a balanced life, making sure that his/her behavior does not contradict the Islamic teachings and at the same time keeps the humble and respectful presence in the society.

Paper Purpose

This paper will discuss the meaning of Ḥayā in Islam, its application in modern day society, and the issues it encounters in the modern world. The discussion will delve into how Ḥayā influences the moral character of Muslims, both in their private lives and in their interactions with others. The paper will also discuss the other social issues that jeopardize the practice and perception of Ḥayawan such as the impact of globalization, secularism and liberalization of social norms.

Since Islam is still practiced in the global society, especially in the non-Islamic societies, it is crucial to know the subtleties of Ḥayā and its implication in the contemporary environment. This paper will present the

² Ibn Majah, "Sunan Ibn Majah," hadith no. 3990.

argument that regardless of the changing nature of society, Ḥayā is an important and useful moral value that defines the lives of Muslims and forms part of the larger society.

2. Ḥayā in Islamic Teachings

References from the Qur'an and Hadith

The idea of Ḥayā has a profound place in the holy texts of the Islamic faith, and there are many instances in the Quran and the Hadith that underline the significance of the concept. Modesty is linked to purity and righteousness as the Quran, the main source of Islamic law and guidance, identifies it as such. One of the verses in this sense belongs to Surah An-Nur that concerns the behavior of both men and women emphasizing the necessity to lower their eyes and to be modest: "Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and protect their private parts. That is purer to them. Indeed, Allah is Aware of their deeds."³ This verse highlights the concept that Ḥayā is a tool of spiritual cleansing, it helps Muslims to guard both their physical and moral integrity.

Similarly, the Qur'an also calls for modesty in the behavior of women.

وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ
فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا

This verse of Surah Al-Ahzab urges women to dress decently because they portray a sign of their inner dignity and as a symbol of their faith: And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and to guard their private parts and not to display their adornment except that which appears thereof and to wrap a portion of their headcovers over their breasts. (Qur'an, 24:31).⁴ This

³ Qur'an, 24:30.

⁴ Qur'an, 24:31.

teaching is a guide to humble conduct, and it is not limited to the dress, but also to the deeds and words.

The importance of Ḥayā is also brought to the fore in the Hadith literature, the collection of sayings and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The Prophet (PBUH) is quoted as saying:

الْحَيَاءُ شُعْبَةٌ مِنَ الْإِيمَانِ

"Modesty is an offshoot of faith. (Sahih Muslim).⁵

This hadith relates Ḥayā to the gist of the Islam belief, which shows that modesty is not merely a practice but an inner quality, which displays the faith of a person in Allah.

Personal Morality Role

In Islamic religion, Ḥayawan is an important factor in the personal ethics. It is a system of control of how a Muslim behaves, instills a sense of self-discipline and makes sure that his/her actions are not contradictory to Islamic values. The virtue of Ḥayā aids in ensuring the balance between personal desires and moral duties, calling on people to be humble, to be non-arrogant, and to take into consideration the needs of other people.

Among the most important things about Ḥayā in the personal morality is the control it puts on behavior. To illustrate, one is encouraged to be modest in speech, actions and even thought as can be observed in the different teachings that are given to Muslims in the Hadith. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

مَنْ كَانَ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ فَلْيَقُلْ خَيْرًا أَوْ لِيَصْمُتْ

⁵ Sahih Muslim, hadith no. 49.

Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, should speak good or keep silent (Sahih al-Bukhari).⁶ This quote reminds Muslims to mind their words and deeds, and the moral restraint developed by Ḥayā.

Additionally, Ḥayā is associated with taqwa (God-consciousness) which is another important Muslim value. Modesty as a practice makes Muslims more conscious of the connection that they have with Allah and therefore make moral decisions and do not do things that would annoy him. With ḥayā, a Muslim is being reminded of the importance of personal dignity and moral uprightness, both in the personal and societal level.

Relation to Other Values

Haya is much connected with such key Islamic values as adab (etiquette), modesty in charity and self-restraint. These values are interrelated as they help Muslims treat other people in a manner that ensures they are at peace with others in the society. As an example, adab, meaning good manners and behaviors, can be expressed by modesty. Be it in the manner of one greeting another individual, the way one interacts with people or the respect they give to elders, Ḥayā is part of what dictates all these.

Another form of Ḥayā in Islam is modesty in charity. Quran tells Muslims to be discreet when giving charity and not to be conspicuous:

إِنْ تُبْدُوا الصَّدَقَاتِ فَنِعِمَّا هِيَ وَإِنْ تُخْفُوهَا وَتُؤْتُوهَا
الْفُقَرَاءَ فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ

⁶ Sahih al-Bukhari, hadith no. 6136.

"When you give your charity, it is good, but when you hide your charity and offer it to the poor, it is better than you do....⁷

This lesson complies with the general idea of Ḥayā, because it teaches one to be humble and discreet in giving generosity.

Additionally, Ḥayā is also connected with Islamic idea of sadaqah (voluntary charity) and self-denial, in which it is conceived that the personal satisfaction cannot be achieved at the cost of the moral obligation to other people. It is this feeling of self-control, which is the main part of the practice of Ḥayā, that allows people to remain faithful to their religion, not to be too attached to the desires of the world, and act ethically even in the most difficult situations.

3. The Idea of Modesty across Cultures

Islamic Modesty and Western Concept of Modesty

The meaning of modesty or Ḥayā in Islam is perceived differently compared to the meaning of modesty in the western societies. Although modesty in both situations entails holding back in the looks and actions, the reasons and practices are very different. Spirituality and faith are intertwined with modesty in Islamic teachings. It is seen as a reflection of one's submission to Allah and an outward expression of inner piety. As discussed above, the Quran and the Hadith attach a lot of importance to modesty in the moral and spiritual context of a Muslim, and both men and women are encouraged to dress in a modest way and to avert their gaze, as it would preserve their dignity and honor.⁸ Modesty in Islam does not only aim at ensuring that

⁷ *Qur'an*, 2:271.

⁸ *Qur'an*, 24:30-31.

there is social harmony but also to ensure that one maintains his or her relationship with Allah.

The Western understanding of modesty in its turn is usually more secular as it is concerned with personal choice and individual autonomy. Although modesty is still appreciated in most of the Western societies, it is mostly regarded as a personal choice, influenced by social values or trends, but not necessarily by religious or spiritual obligations. The western concept of modesty is usually associated with notions of individual comfort and freedom where people are at liberty to decide on dressing and acting according to their preferences, as per the current trends within the society.

The discrepancies in the perception of modesty between Islam and the West may at times create some misunderstandings or conflicts especially in multicultural environments. As an example, though Muslim women who wear the hijab are perceived as oppressed in the western world, by wearing the hijab, many of them view the hijab as a way of being modest and religious as a way of empowering themselves and defining their identity.⁹

Modesty History

Traditionally, the notion of modesty in Islam has been transformed with the changes in the social norms and practices, yet, it has never lost its spiritual and moral essence. During the early Islamic, Islamic civilization was marked by modesty that affected many sectors of life including dress code and social interaction. The teaching on modesty by Islam did not only apply to the personal appearance, but it also applied to the behavior, communication, and social interaction. Indicatively, the prophet

⁹ Hijab and Empowerment, Journal of Islamic Studies, 2020.

Muhammad (PBUH) insisted on being humble and modest in his speech and deeds, which acts as a role model to Muslims in every aspect of their lives. Another cultural value of modesty during the Islamic Golden Age was reflected in art, literature, and philosophy. Scholars, poets and artists followed the modesty principles of Islam and created the works of humble and modest values. As an example, Islamic art did not depict human beings in a manner that can be deemed to be immodest or prideful, but rather it emphasized the use of geometric designs and calligraphy as a form of beauty and spiritual reflection.

But, when Islam diffused to the other areas and mixed with other cultures it started being shaped by the local customs and traditions as the idea of modesty. In other instances, the modesty practice was mixed with local dress codes and culture and thus modesty was manifested in different ways in various Muslim societies. In spite of these differences, the essence of modesty was similar throughout the Muslim world and portrayed the eternal teachings of the Quran and Hadith.

Globalization and Cultural Influence

With the era of globalization, the western cultural influences have greatly affected the perception and practice of modesty among the Muslim societies. The spread of the Western media, fashion and style so fast has brought a new set of thinking on what beauty is, what is the body image and how one can express themselves, which has often contradicted the traditional views on modesty. To illustrate, the growing exposure to Western ideas of beauty and the standardization of exposing attires in fashion and media may cause friction in the societies where modesty is highly regarded.

A certain change in the attitude towards modesty, especially among younger generations, has been observed in some Muslim-majority countries. Due to

the emergence of social media and trends in the fashion industry across the globe, most youths are exposed to Western standards of freedom and individuality, which do not always resonate with their conservative backgrounds of modesty and the society they live in.¹⁰ This conflict of values may lead to identity crisis especially among the Muslim youths who want to reconcile their Islamic values with those of the contemporary society.

Conversely, globalization has also contributed to the increasing global Muslim community in which the common values of modesty are being strengthened by transnational media, online forums, and social movements. The internet has also enabled Muslim women who are willing to dress up and be weary of their dressing to reach out to each other thus developing a feeling of unity and support in spite of cultural and geographical diversity. Through this means, globalization has not only questioned the concept of modesty among the modern Muslim societies but has also put it into practice.

4. Ḥayā in the contemporary society

Maintaining the Moral Values of the Contemporary world.

The applicability of Ḥayā (modesty) in the current fast-evolving world is a crucial ethical principle that is essential in preserving ethical principles especially in modern society where individualism and materialism are highly valued. With the secularism, consumerism, and culture of social media, Ḥayā provides the model of ethical living, which can help maintain personal dignity, cultivate respect towards others, and promote self-control. The Quranic teachings that portray the significance of modesty in individual

¹⁰ Globalization and Its Impact on Muslim Youth”, Muslim Youth Journal, 2019.

behavior and appearance is a reminder to Muslims that, as the modern life continues to pose greater challenges, they should not give way in maintaining these two fundamental moral principles.¹¹

Personal responsibility and integrity is one of the most important ways that Ḥayā helps the society today. Nowadays, when moral relativism and social pressures tend to determine the actions of individuals, the idea of Ḥayā makes people do things guided by good moral values, instead of being influenced by the passing fashion in society. To give a few examples, humility in words, demeanor and behavior would be a reminder that the personality of a person matters more than shallow looks or social approval. According to Islam, the real worth of an individual is his/her inner features, e.g. his/her faith and good behavior but not his/her outward look and material prosperity.¹²

More so, Ḥayā offers a moral guide amid the growing secularism, where religious and cultural values are unappreciated. Through modesty, Muslims can manoeuvre through the challenges of the modern world without losing their essential values. To illustrate, Ḥayā can be used as an antidote in a world where social media promotes the sharing of personal experience and showing off personal lives, by promoting discretion, humility, and preservation of dignity(3).¹³ It can help people not to fall into the trap of seeking external validation or self-promotion, as it is typical in contemporary society.

Social Interactions and Ḥayā

¹¹ *Qur'an*, 24:30.

¹² *Qur'an*, 2:177.

¹³ Al-Ghazali, "The Revival of the Religious Sciences," trans. Fazlur Rahman, 2010.

Modesty is not merely a personal attribute but it plays a crucial role in dictating how people relate to one another in society and build respect. In a community, Ḥayā makes people respect each other and this fosters a development of understanding and consideration. The gesture of looking down, being attentive to words, and being respectful to others is in line with the principle of kindness and empathy that are essential to the proper operation of a society.

In modern life, where the idea of personal boundaries is commonly lost because of the widespread use of social media and other online services, Ḥayā offers a distinct moral code of the way to act. An example is modesty as respectful contact, both physical and online, which fosters a culture of decency and conserves the dignity of people. Modesty is a value that is upheld in Islam, and social media sites are the complete opposite, promoting self-promotion, and over-exposure. In this case, the Ḥayā teachings can be used to guide the online interactions by promoting moderation, humility, and respect towards oneself.¹⁴

Also, ḥayat leads to the establishment of a respectful atmosphere both in the family, workplace, and the community. Modesty creates an environment of trust, respect and support in the family, which is crucial in developing healthy relationships. Professionally, humility prevents arrogance or boasting, as it promotes cooperation and teamwork. It may be in the manner in which the Muslims dress, conduct themselves or even in how they communicate with others, the Ḥayā principles direct them to make sure that

¹⁴ "Social Media and Modesty: The Islamic Perspective," *Journal of Islamic Ethics*, 2019.

in their conduct, they demonstrate respect to themselves and others hence resulting into social harmony.¹⁵

Media and technological impact

The emergence of technology and social media have posed new challenges to the practice of Ḥayā in the modern society. With the growing popularity of Instagram, Facebook, and Tik Tok in a society where people are encouraged to share their personal lives publicly, modesty is frequently compromised by the need to gain fame, attention, or validation. The ethics of Ḥayā (privacy, humility, discretion, etc.) are often violated in favor of the development of a carefully selected image of oneself, as people continue to post more and more personal information on the internet.¹⁶ This may result in personal boundaries being lost and a person may reveal parts of his/her life that may affect his/her dignity or status.

Nevertheless, these same platforms that question the practice of Ḥayā also offer a chance to further support its applicability. Muslim influencers and content creators have started to utilize social media to encourage ethical conduct and modesty online. Indicatively, a few Muslim women who wear the hijab or dress modestly have become the key figures in social media, demonstrating that it is possible to be successful and influential and follow the principles of modesty. These role models are changing the way a person can be considered modern, successful and modest, proving that it is possible not to forget about your values and still be able to take steps in the digital era.¹⁷

¹⁵ "Modesty in Professional Settings," Islamic Business Review, 2018.

¹⁶ "Privacy and Modesty in the Age of Social Media," Muslim Ethics Quarterly, 2020.

¹⁷ "Modesty and Social Media: Redefining the Narrative," Journal of Islamic Studies, 2021.

As technology continues to evolve, it is important for Muslims to find a balance between embracing modern tools and staying true to the principles of Ḥayā. Through responsible use of social media, people can still foster modesty, maintain their dignity and moral uprightness as they interact with the world.

5-Challenges to Ḥayā in Contemporary Society

Social and Cultural Pressures

The cultural and social pressure to conform to mainstream values that are usually incompatible with Islamic values of modesty can be considered one of the main challenges to the practice of Ḥayā in modern society. The traditional moral values such as modesty have been eroded in most societies due to the emphasis on individual freedom, self-expression and material success. These are the pressures that are particularly widespread in media where the images of beauty, success, and happiness are idealized and are presented in ways that do not comply with Islamic principles of modesty. The excessive exhibition of wealth, beauty and physical appearance in the popular culture creates enormous pressure on people especially the youth to conform to these ideals and they find it hard to apply Ḥayā .¹⁸

In this kind of social world, modesty is even perceived as old-fashioned or oppressive. Most young Muslims are confronted with the dilemma of having to juggle their religious ethics and the demands of their peer groups and the society as a whole. An example is that young Muslim women who embrace the practice of dressing in modest attires, including the hijab, might be criticized or discriminated, even among and outside the communities. The social pressure to appear in a specific way or act in a certain way may

¹⁸ "Social Media and the Pressure to Conform to Beauty Standards," *Journal of Social Issues*, 2020.

make it hard to practice the values of Ḥayā since one may be afraid of being judged, marginalized or even mocked because of his/her modest decisions.¹⁹ This friction between Islamic principles of modesty and social pressures results in a clash within oneself where people are unable to retain their religious identity as they find themselves in a world that appears to value looks and materialism.

Misunderstanding of Ḥayā

The other important issue that hampers the practice of Ḥayā in the modern society is the misconception and misinterpretation of the concept, especially when it comes to the issue of modest dressing among women. Although the moral value of ḥayā is a holistic concept that extends beyond dressing to speech, conduct, and attitude, it is commonly understood to refer only to the physical look of things, particularly the wrapping of the body. Such reductionist approach to Ḥayā may be a source of misunderstanding, in which modesty is viewed as a purely physical and external phenomenon, but not as an expression of a personality and spirituality.²⁰

Wearing of attire, particularly the hijab by a woman, in most societies may be taken to override the more holistic nature of modesty which Ḥayā symbolizes in the Islamic world. It has prompted discussions and arguments concerning the hijab and modest dress, with some people and organizations considering it an act of oppression, and others considering it as a demonstration of faith and personality. This separation usually arises because of not comprehending ḥayā as a moral principle which is much deeper and extends beyond mere appearance. The decline of modesty into

¹⁹ "Islamic Modesty and Its Social Implications," Muslim Identity Journal, 2018.

²⁰ "Misunderstanding Modesty: The Hijab Debate," Middle East Studies Review, 2019.

simple clothing options overlooks the richness of Ḥayā, including humility of heart, self-control, and reverence towards others.²¹

Secularism and Its Impact

Another problem with the practice of Ḥayā in modern society is secularism, which promotes the division of religion and life in the state. The secularism process has contributed to the exclusion of religious values in the communal context in most of the western societies and even more so in the non-Muslim majority countries, where the emphasis is made on individual autonomy and personal freedom. Such environment may render the practice of modesty by Muslims challenging without ridicule or exclusion. The focus on personal freedom in secular societies can be very contradictory to the requirements of the religion in terms of modest conduct and clothing, and the Muslims who decide to follow these requirements feel lonely or out of place.²²

To illustrate this, in most Western nations, the concept of modesty may tend to sound very limiting and even patriarchal with regards to the rights of women and gender equality. The assumption that women are free to dress whichever they want, without being bound by religious or cultural standards, tends to come into conflict to the Islamic perspective of modest dressing, as a significant part of the dignity and faith of a woman. Thus, Muslim women who dress decently can be perceived as being oppressed or subjugated even though they make such a decision based on their religious convictions and the need to preserve their spirituality.²³

²¹ "The Hijab: Symbol of Oppression or Empowerment?" Islamic Feminism Quarterly, 2020.

²² "Secularism and the Erosion of Modesty," International Journal of Islamic Studies, 2017.

²³ "Women's Rights and Modesty in the Modern World," Muslim Women's Rights Journal, 2021.

The role of women and modesty

Besides the pressures brought about by secularism and culture, the place of women in relation to modesty has become a controversial question in the present-day discussions of gender equality and women rights. Feminism and Islamic modesty have come into conflict with each other, resulting in different interpretations of Ḥayā and some understanding it as a form of oppression, others as a decision by women to empower themselves through self-respect and following the religious values.

According to Islamic feminists, modesty and especially donning the hijab should be viewed as an empowering and agentic action as opposed to oppression. They say that women ought to be allowed to make their own choice on the way they dress according to their beliefs and values and not based on the societal or cultural pressures.²⁴ Conversely, those who criticize the Islamic modesty tend to interpret the modesty of women as some form of patriarchal control whereby the strictness of the dress-codes is a way of limiting women to exercise their independence and personal freedom. This clash of views shows that gender, modesty and individual liberty is a complicated issue in the modern society.

6. Modesty among Islamic Feminism

Islamic Feminism and Ḥayā

Islamic feminism is an emerging movement that aims to bring together the teaching of feminism and the Islamic teachings. With regards to modesty, Islamic feminists tend to emphasise the enabling nature of Ḥayā, which they consider as a moral value, which enables women to be independent and respectful in a world that tends to objectify them. In contrast to secular

²⁴ Islamic Feminism and Modesty: A New Perspective," Journal of Islamic Feminist Thought, 2020

feminism, which tends to focus on eliminating religious aspects of the lives of women, Islamic feminism claims that modesty is a powerful option that enables women to have an agency over their bodies and their personalities. In this regard, modesty is viewed as a way of opposing the hyper-sexualized image of women which dominates our media and consumer culture.

Islamic feminists state that Ḥayawan in a good intention can make women retain their personal dignity under their control. The decision to dress up conservatively, including the hijab, is not portrayed as a form of oppression but a way of establishing oneself and their belief to the pressure of the world to adapt to secular or material values. They claim that Islam has provided women with the right to make a choice of how they prefer to show off their modesty and the choice is a form of empowerment rather than oppression.²⁵ To a lot of Muslim women, the decision to dress modestly is a self statement of religious belief, which gives them strength to disregard the ideals of beauty and to express their spiritual beliefs.

The idea of Ḥayā within Islamic feminism is the fact that modesty is not merely the issue of looks and clothing, but a holistic principle that covers actions, words, and the manner in which one speaks. It teaches women to restrain themselves, not to be arrogant, and to focus on their inner being rather than on their looks. This interpretation of modesty as an expression of inner beauty of a woman is regarded as liberating, because in this way women can concentrate on their moral values instead of adhering to social ideals of beauty that tend to devalue them.²⁶

Contradictions and Alignments

²⁵ "Islamic Feminism and the Role of Modesty in Empowerment," *Journal of Islamic Feminist Thought*, 2020.

²⁶ *Qur'an*, 33:59.

As much as the Islamic feminism has provided an empowering interpretation of the Ḥayā, some tension and contradiction still exists in the wider feminist movement. The way of understanding modesty as a religious compulsion is one of the major areas of controversy, especially regarding the hijab. The hijab in secular feminist circles is widely regarded as a sign of patriarchal dominance and theological oppression because of its perception as a necessity imposed on women by their communities or families.²⁷ This perception tends to ignore the individual decision of a large number of Muslim women who are willing to wear the hijab as an expression of religious belief and liberation.

Conversely, Islamic feminists believe that the hijab is not a means of oppression but it enables women to enjoy their body sovereignty and objectification of their bodies. Wearing the hijab, women are consciously deciding to preserve their religiousness and ethical values rather than succumbing to the external social influences. They claim that wearing a hijab is an individual decision that demonstrates a more significant devotion to modesty and Islamic beliefs, and even can be empowering in itself. In this respect, the hijab is a representation of individual freedom and religiosity.²⁸

Modesty is the imperative of religion, but the problem is to find a balance between these two needs the religious imperative of modesty and the need of autonomy and self-expression. Islamic feminism encourages women to have the right to choose how to demonstrate their modesty, but in some cases, the pressure of the society or family may make a distinction between

²⁷ "The Hijab Debate: Oppression or Empowerment?" *Islamic Feminism Quarterly*, 2021.

²⁸ "The Role of Modesty in Islamic Feminism," *Muslim Women's Journal*, 2019.

free will and force. Such a conflict may bring challenges to Muslim women trying to balance the conflict of their religious beliefs, their feminist principles, and their community expectations (5).²⁹

Modesty, especially Ḥayā, can be understood as a moral value that gives women a sense of power in an Islamic context using the prism of Islamic feminism. Through the focus on the decision and agency in modesty, Islamic feminists disrupt the historical accounts of oppression that are linked to the hijab and modest dress. Nevertheless, internal conflict between the individual will and social or family pressure are also issues that the movement struggles to resolve. In spite of such issues, Islamic feminism has served as an avenue where women can exercise their rights to modesty, dignity and self-expression in such a manner that does not contradict their religious beliefs and personal ideals.

7.Saving Ḥayā in the Age of Globalization

Adapting Islamic Modesty to Modern Contexts

The most urgent issue that Muslims face in the era of globalization is how to preserve the traditional values such as Ḥayā (modesty) and at the same time interact with the world that is changing very fast and becoming interconnected. The widespread impact of western culture, social media and consumerism have resulted in an environment of globalization where individualism and materialism often override the collective moral superiority. When operating in such an environment, it is necessary to adapt to the practice of Ḥayawan, without undermining its key principles.

²⁹ "Feminism and Modesty: Navigating the Tension," Journal of Social and Political Studies, 2020.

In the case of Muslims, there is the issue of having to find means of applying Islamic teachings on modesty to contemporary situations and still retain the value of the teaching. The main features of Ḥayawan, including humility, self-control and inner morality are still important in modern society. The question, though, is how such values manifest themselves in a world that becomes more and more obsessed with surface looks and self-promotion, which must be negotiated carefully.

In the contemporary world, where fashion trends and social networks have significant impact on shaping one as an individual, Muslims have to learn to negotiate the social media without violating their ethical beliefs. To illustrate, though modesty in dressing is the main focus of Ḥayā, Muslims should learn how their actions, words and social life are in line with the principles of Ḥayya. The trick is to tailor the modesty practice to the modern context without succumbing to the temptation to become secularized and adhere to the secular values which in most cases are contrary to Islamic teachings of morality and decency.³⁰

Educational and Social Programs

Education is one of the best means of saving Ḥayaa in the globalization era. Through educating the youth about the importance of modesty and how they can live by it in the contemporary world, a generation of Muslims that will be able to proudly hold these values can be nurtured. Modesty, as a dress code and as a holistic value that defines what one does, decides and relates with others can be taught in educational programs, not only in schools, but also in the community.

³⁰ "Islamic Modesty and Globalization: Adapting Without Compromising," Journal of Islamic Ethics, 2021.

Islamic schools, communal organizations, and the internet should be instrumental in enhancing the concept of Ḥayawan as a teaching of Ḥayawan as a moral system that can be applied in every area of life. These organizations would be able to offer advice on the way to be modest in interaction with social media, in the workplace and in social life. Promoting debates about modesty in relation to such concepts as self-respect, dignity, and moral integrity can assist Muslims to overcome the intricacies of contemporary life without losing their Islamic identity.³¹

There should also be social programs highlighting the importance of modesty in establishing harmonious and respectful communities. Such projects can promote a spirit of unity among Muslims in the globalised world where cultural diversities tend to create misunderstandings. These programs can be used to make Muslims identify with the similar values like respect, humility and kindly which can make Muslims cohere together on the similar value of modesty irrespective of their culture and geographical location.³²

Government and Religious Leaders' Role

There is also a vital role to play by governments and religious leaders in conserving Ḥayā in the internationalized world. By their sermons and teachings, religious leaders can keep on stressing the value of modesty and encourage their communities to maintain modesty in their daily lives. They are also able to offer forums through which the challenges facing modernity

³¹ "The Role of Education in Preserving Islamic Values," Muslim Education Quarterly, 2019.

³² "Social Programs and Modesty in a Globalized World," Islamic Social Studies Review, 2020.

on Islamic values can be discussed and practical solutions can be offered on how to go about it.

The Ḥayā can be preserved by governments in the Muslim-majority countries only by creating the environment that encourages and respects Islamic values, and at the same time, by granting the freedom of expression and interaction with the rest of the world. This may involve a policy that safeguards the right of those to practice modesty, like making sure that women are allowed the freedom to dress modestly like wearing the hijab without being discriminated in the workplace or in general life.

Additionally, governments and institutions can work together to establish forums of the role of modesty in the current world where scholars, religious leaders and community members can discuss how to maintain and enhance Ḥayā in the contemporary world. Such efforts would be useful in bridging the gap between tradition and modernity to make sure that Islamic values prevail in a globalized world.³³

8. Case Studies and Examples

West Muslim Communities

Western Muslims have their own problems with practicing Ḥayā (modesty) because of the cultural differences with the world and the pressures of society that can be contrary to Islamic values. To most Muslims in the west, it may be a balancing act between trying to fulfill their religious beliefs and become part of a society where individualism and secularism is mainstream. An important illustration of the Ḥayā practised by Muslims in the West may be considered in the increased number of Muslim women who wear the hijab even though they may become a target of social stigma or

³³ "The Role of Religious Leaders in Promoting Modesty," *Journal of Religious Leadership*, 2018.

discrimination. In such nations as the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, Muslim women in the hijab tend to have difficulties at the workplace, in schools or even in the streets where secular culture does not coincide with the Muslim dress code. Nevertheless, the choice of wearing the hijab to many Muslim women is regarded as an individual act of devotion and decency, as a manifestation of their adherence to the Islamic principle of Ḥayā.

The encounter of the Muslim women wearing the hijab in the West also brings out the overlap between modesty and the question of identity, autonomy and opposition. The hijab can also be used as an emblem of resistance to secular forces that want to assimilate into the Western ideals of beauty and liberation. According to many Muslim women, the reasoning behind wearing the hijab is not oppression but a powering decision that enables them to establish their identity in personal terms. Here, Ḥayā is a kind of opposition to the objectification of women and the urge to meet the beauty ideals of society.³⁴

Modern-Day Challenges

An actual-life situation of how Muslims struggle to practice Ḥayā in the contemporary world could be observed in the power of social media and online solutions. The emergence of Instagram, Tik Tok, and Snapchat, where self-promotion and appearance matters are placed more prominently, poses a challenge to the Islamic principle of modesty. These sites tend to propagate hyper-sexuality culture, in which exposing attires and self-disclosure are accepted.

³⁴ "The Hijab and Muslim Women's Identity in Western Societies," *Journal of Islamic Feminism*, 2019.

As a response to this, a number of Muslim influencers and content creators have begun leveraging social media to advance the idea of modesty and a more ethical attitude towards self-presentation. As an illustration, Muslim fashion influencers can be found on the most popular social media platforms such as Instagram and they can be used to share their modest fashion selections to show that modesty and modern fashion can be used together. These influencers tend to emphasize that their simple fashion preferences are in line with the Islamic concepts of Ḥayā and demonstrate that it is feasible to uphold dignity and respect towards oneself and find interactions with the rest of the online community.

Using their influencer status, these Muslim influencers confront the prevailing discourse in mainstream media, providing an alternative example of self-expression that enforces modesty and moral conduct. This example shows how Ḥayā values are being maintained in the digital age, an update of the traditional Islamic teachings.³⁵

9. Conclusion

Overview of Major aspects

We have discussed the meaning of Ḥayā (modesty) as one of the fundamental moral values of Islam and its applicability in the modern society in this paper. The paper emphasized the aspect of Ḥayā that is not merely about exterior looks or conduct but is a holistic worth that defines the character of a Muslim and his or her relationships with others. Based on the Quran and the Hadith, Ḥayā is used by Muslims as a guide towards modest behavior, humility, and self-restraint. Although the fundamental

³⁵ "Social Media, Modesty, and Muslim Influencers: A New Paradigm," Muslim Digital Ethics Review, 2020.

principles of Ḥayā are still applicable, we have also noticed the impact of contemporary pressures like globalization, social media, and cultural pressures on the practice and understanding of modesty.

The paper explained how the Western understanding of modesty usually differs with the Islamic perspectives, where in the Western world, modesty is more of a personal decision whereas in Islam, it is closely connected to the religious obligation as well as the spiritual purity. Globalization and secularism pose some threats to preserving traditional values, however, the opportunity to adjust Ḥayā to new circumstances without losing its spirit exists.

Concluding on the Relevance of Ḥayā

Although modern society is changing, the significance of Ḥayā cannot be ignored. In a world where materialism, self-promotion, and the constant urge to meet the secular ideas of beauty are the key values, Ḥayā provides a moral system that determines the inner qualities rather than outward looks. Modesty, being a value, does not only save the personal dignity, but also promotes societal harmony, respect, and ethical behaviors in a dynamically changing world.

As Muslims interact more with the modern world, it is imperative to point out that Ḥayā does not only pertain to external modesty in dress but also modest behavior, speech and attitudes. Muslims can still demonstrate the ideals of Ḥayā and adapt to the modern conditions, both through social media or in the workplace.

Future Research Recommendations

Future studies may examine the overlap between Ḥayā and other social movements, including feminist ideas and gender equality, particularly with regards to Muslim-majority and Western societies. The practical uses of modesty as seen in contemporary careers, including the business and media,

would also be an interesting study of how Muslims can preserve moral integrity and succeed in various settings. Also, the research on the effects of social media influencers who advocate modesty might offer a distinctive angle to the changing role of Ḥayā in the digital era.

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