

**The Importance of Modesty Virtue in Islamic
Communication;
Ethics and Islamic management**

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Abstract

Today, along with globalization phenomenon, despite of pluralistic cultures, some cultural elements are being extended. The dominant culture in multimedia constantly bombards all communities with impurity and immodesty. Also, day to day under these conditions, *Voyeurism* phenomenon which is the most commonly associated with sexual perversion has become a mainstream pastime. So, it is needed to take a stand against especially in the area of modesty and fashions of clothing and behavior_in Islamic communities. Although, there are some attempts even in academic level to explain modesty as a failed virtue, Islamic culture is still very rich in this context to answer every question and the Islamic scholars in the field of educational and social management should deal with this sensitive issue. Basically, modesty does not belong to any specific culture; but it has been used as an explanation for some behaviors in several qualitative studies and numerous cultural monographs. Although, modesty is difficult to define, there is a real distinction between modesty and false modesty. A fundamental characteristic of modesty is the fact that it is not simply a self-regarding attitude, but is instead a profoundly other-regarding stance. The Quran has recommended observing chastity and modesty at looking, walking and speaking and even observing appropriate coverage for women. These commands are considered useful for growth of human perfection, spiritual enhancement and protection of family and social life sustainability. So, we are living in a time of moral confusion, and our generation's indifference to moral concerns is reflected in many of today's styles. These immodest behaviors and nudity often encourage sexual lust which is considered sins in Islam attitude. Always feminist researchers have considered this practice by women as a different form of religious patriarchies. However, in fact, wearing a modest dress is manifestation of modesty in the appearance of every person, especially in a woman. It is also considered as a badge of honor, of sexual reserve and a sign of their high degree of devoutness that each woman undertakes voluntarily. Therefore the development of modesty observance helps women in 3 forms: to claim their traditional-religious identity, to treat and dress in a way that allows them to work and study outside their homes equally, to protect themselves from sexual harassment in society. This study attempts to state the importance and impact of observing modesty in our Islamic communication.

Keywords: Islam, Women, Modesty, Communication, Virtue

We live in such era in which modesty rules are about to be forgotten more than ever. Even this odd phenomenon day to day is normalizing as one of symbols of freedom and socializing. Everywhere; media propaganda invites to immodesty and the kinds of enjoying it. Meanwhile, some western authors have dealt with this concern. Wendy Shalit in her book; “A Return to Modesty”, writes that today, we have lost our respect for an important classical virtue [¹] of sexual modesty. [²] Shalit in her thoughtful three-part essay, with humor and piercing insight, probes the cultural history of sexual modesty and considers whether this virtue may be beneficial in today's world.[³] Today, a woman’s beauty is paraded and flaunted without limits throughout the media, as a worthless object of lust and mindless desire. Her body, which was created as a pure symbol of grace, is displayed in shameless ways to corrupt minds and distort the meaning of ‘beauty’ and limit it in physic.

Beside of a few countries which enforce rigid dress codes, still modesty in dress and deportment is encouraged by all traditional religions and cultures in the world. Obviously, the teachings of all religions; especially divine religions, are full of rules and recommendations about modesty. Whereas, some assert that their holy books recommend modesty norms in body, dress, and behavior of both women and men. [^{4, 5, 6, 7}] And such rules for proper dress and

¹ Wendy Shalit in this book writes about the changing the westerns’ view in this issue, that before, a young woman had to be ashamed of her sexual experience however, today she is ashamed of her sexual inexperience, Where not long ago a girl was ashamed to show public evidence of sexual desire by living with someone, today she need to have evidence of romantic desire.

² Shalit, Wendy, A Return to Modesty: Discovering the Lost Virtue, First ed., Touchstone, 2000.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Arthur, L., ed., Religion, Dress and the Body, Oxford, UK: Berg, 1999.

⁵ Abdullah, A. R. ed., Islamic Dress Code for Women, Global Leader in Islamic Books, Saudi Arabia: Darussalam 2004.

⁶ Al-Rashidi, S. B., The Status of Beard in Islam. Translated and edited by M. Saleem Ahsan. Lahore, Pakistan: Dar-ul-Andlus. 2007.

behavior rely on all interpretations and respective of holy books (Qur'an, The Old and New Testament).⁸ Shalit, in her book, has provided some Orthodox Jewish and Islamic rules of modesty and modest dress to show the benefits of restraint in male-female relations.

Among divine religions, Islam is very rich in this virtue. In a number of things that the Islamic way of life encourages, modesty has a prominent place in Islamic society. Modesty in Islam is considered a fundamental one's faith and a way to save mankind from transgression.

Concept of Modesty

Several compoterary authors have already attempted to define modesty stipulatively, for the purpose of conducting new empirical studies [⁹] or of integrating existing findings [¹⁰]. However, these definitions, being definitions, could be faulted for overly prioritizing rigor.[¹¹]

⁷ Anthony, C. Modesty in the Service of Justice: Retrieving Tradition and Reversing the Gaze. *Horizons* 36:265–84. 2009.

⁸ M. Morin, Karen, Men's Modesty, Religion, and the State: Spaces of Collision, submitted to *Journal of: Men and Masculinities*, published online 21 March 2013.

⁹ Cialdini, R. B., Wosinska, W., Dabul, A. J., Whestone-Dion, R., & Heszen, I. (1998). When role salience leads to social role rejection: Modest self-presentation among women and men in two cultures. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 24, 473-481.

¹⁰ Sedikides, C., Gregg, A. P., & Hart, C. M. (2007). The importance of being modest. In C. Sedikides & S. Spencer (Eds.), *The self: Frontiers in social psychology* (pp. 163-184). New York: Psychology Press.

¹¹ P. Gregg, Aiden, M. Hart, Claire, Sedikides, Constantine Everyday Conceptions of Modesty: A Prototype Analysis, *Bulletin Society for Personality and Social Psychology (PSPB)*, Vol. 34 No. 7, July 2008 978-992

For trying to develop a good theoretical definition of a phenomenon, needs to be negotiated between rigor and coverage.^[12, 13]

First, the construct of modesty has recently been a focus of burgeoning empirical and theoretical research a veritable hot topic, particularly with the resurgence of interest in positive psychology and character virtues [^{14, 15, 16, 17}], in the potential disadvantages of self-enhancement and high self-esteem [^{18, 19, 20}], and in cultural variations in self-construal [^{21, 22, 23}].²⁴

¹² Between the neat exactitude of scientific constructs and the obliging looseness of everyday concepts. (P. Gregg, Aiden, M. Hart, Claire, Sedikides, Constantine Everyday Conceptions of Modesty: A Prototype Analysis, Bulletin Society for Personality and Social Psychology (PSPB), Vol. 34 No. 7, July 2008 978-992)

¹³ P. Gregg, Aiden, M. Hart, Claire, Sedikides, Constantine Everyday Conceptions of Modesty: A Prototype Analysis, Bulletin Society for Personality and Social Psychology (PSPB), Vol. 34 No. 7, July 2008 978-992

¹⁴ Exline, J. J., Campbell, W. K., Baumeister, R. F., Joiner, T., & Krueger, J. 2004.

¹⁵ Gilbert, D., *Stumbling on happiness*. New York: Knopf. 2006.

¹⁶ Neff, K. D., Self-compassion: An alternative conceptualization of a healthy attitude toward oneself. *Self and Identity*, 2, 85-102. 2003.

¹⁷ Peterson, C., Park, N., & Seligman, M. E. P. Greater strengths of character and recovery from illness. *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 1, 17-26. 2006.

¹⁸ Baumeister, R. F., Campbell, J. D., Krueger, J. I., & Vohs, K. D., Does high self-esteem cause better performance, interpersonal success, happiness or healthier lifestyles? *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 4, 1-44. 2003.

¹⁹ Dunning, D., Heath, C., & Suls, J. M., Flawed self-assessment. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 5, 69-106. 2004

²⁰ Sedikides, C., Gregg, A. P., & Hart, C. M., The importance of being modest. In C. Sedikides & S. Spencer (Eds.), *The self: Frontiers in social psychology* (pp. 163-184). New York: Psychology Press. 2007.

In the American Heritage Dictionary is written about meaning of modesty: “reserve or propriety in speech, dress, or behavior.”^[25]

Ragheb Al-Isfahani in Al-Mofradat writes about the modesty (عفة):

عفة: العفة حصول حالة للنفس تترنح بهباعن غلبة الشهوة، والمتعفف المتعاطى لذلك بضرب من الممارسة والقهر، وأصله الاقتصار على تناول الشيء القليل الجارى مجرى العفافة، والعفة أي البقية من الشيء، أو مجرى العفف وهو ثمرا الاراك، والاستعفاف طلب العفة، قال (ومن كان غنيا فليستعفف) وقال (وليستعفف الذين لا يجدون نكاحا).^[26]

Terminologically, Effah, is obtaining a state in soul by which it avoids from domination of lust, it's root means in taking of little things. The actual request of modesty and chastity is to stop and avoid from harams which is called Este'afaf (استعفاف).

“A Return to Modesty” as a deeply account writes that modesty is not a social construct, but a natural response. And modesty is not prudery, but a way to preserve a sense of the erotic in our lives.²⁷ In fact, modesty is a mode of dress and deportment intended not to encourage sexual attraction in others but, actual standards vary widely.

²¹ Bond, M. H., Kwan, V. S. Y., & Li, C., (2000). Decomposing a sense of superiority: The differential social impact of self-regard and regard-for-others. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 34, 537-553.

²² Chen, S. X., Bond, M. H., & Tang, D., Behavioral manifestations of modesty: Do self-construals work differently in different collectivistic cultures? Unpublished manuscript, Beijing Normal University, China. 2006.

²³ Sedikides, C., Gaertner, L., & Toguchi, Y. (2003). Pancultural selfenhancement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84, 60-70.

²⁴ P. Gregg, Aiden, M. Hart, Claire, Sedikides, Constantine Everyday Conceptions of Modesty: A Prototype Analysis, *Bulletin Society for Personality and Social Psychology (PSPB)*, Vol. 34 No. 7, July 2008 978-992

²⁵ American Heritage Dictionary, 2nd ed., Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1985.

²⁶ الراغب الاصفهاني ابى القاسم الحسين بن محمد (المتوفى سنة 502)، المفردات في غريب القرآن الراغب ، المحقق: مركز الدراسات والبحوث بمكتبة نزار مصطفى الباز حالة الفهرسة: م فهرس فهرسة كاملة، الناشر: مكتبة نزار مصطفى الباز الراغب الاصفهاني، 2010.

²⁷ Shalit, Wendy., A Return to Modesty: Discovering the Lost Virtue, First ed., Touchstone, 2000.

Importance of Modesty in Quran

Overall, the derivatives of modesty (عفة) have been used in the Quran for four times that in the two times, it generally means self-control or self-esteem by avoiding expressing the need to others, while other two stated in the sense of sexual restraint:

1- وليستعفف الذين لا يجدون نكاحا حتي يغنيهم الله من فضله... [28]

In this verse, self-control (استعفف) is considered to tame the sexual power and restraint of sexual sins during singleness.

2- والقواعد من النساء اللاتي لا يرجون نكاحا فليس عليهن جناح ان يضعن ثيابهن غير متبرجات بزينته و ان يستعففن خير لهن والله سميع عليم. [29]

In this regard, Quran has demonstrated to the importance of prudency (يا). In the story of Moses and Zaphorah returning to the well, the lady approached him shyly. A verse in the Quran that tells us this story stresses upon the manner of her approaching Moses:

فجاءته احدهما تمشي على استحياء قالت ان ابى يدعوك ليجزيك اجر ما سقيت لنا... [30]

So, God appreciates the walking manner of shoayb's daughter in Quran.

Holy Quran considers modesty and having coverage as a natural human desire for covering private body:

يَا بَنِي آدَمَ قَدْ أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكُمْ لِبَاسًا يُؤَارَى سَوْءَتِكُمْ وَ رِيشًا وَ لِبَاسَ التَّقْوَى ذَلِكَ خَيْرٌ ذَلِكَ مِنْ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَذَكَّرُونَ.

²⁸ نور/33

²⁹ نور/60

³⁰ قصص/25

This verse shows the importance of clothing in the Qur'an and the phrase of "يُؤَارِي سَوْءَكُمْ" implies that human needs covering. Even Quran has known Adam and his wife in a suitable heaven coverage that is gone because of their sin. So, in Islam, the human body is regarded as a cause of shame that must be hidden and covered, a view that relates back to Adam and Eve [31]. Modesty and chastity are coveted and sacred aspects of one's personality and character. [32]

Modesty in Hadiths

Modesty in Islam is known as 'Haya', a word which describes both shyness and a deeper modesty that is based on faith. A sense of Haya should affect a Muslim's conduct before God, before others and even when one is alone. In hadiths the significance of this virtue is reflected:

"Every religion has a distinctive virtue, and the distinctive virtue of Islam is modesty (Haya). [33]

And also, the Beloved Messenger of Allah said: "Modesty brings nothing but good." [34]

"When lewdness is a part of anything, it becomes defective; and when haya is a part of anything it becomes beautiful." [35]

³¹ Khuri, F.I.. The body in Islamic culture. London: Saqi Books. 2001.

³² Asifa Siraj (2011) Meanings of modesty and the hijab amongst Muslim women in

Glasgow, Scotland, *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, 18:6, 716-731

³³ Abu Dawud, Malik

³⁴ Muslim and Bukhari

³⁵ Tirmidhi

Modesty, in the sense of shyly protecting oneself with propriety from the lustful or envious gaze, means one takes care about how to express oneself in word and deed.³⁶ One of the modesty signs is considered covering for men and women. There is a quotation from the Prophet (sa) about Moses (as):

ان موسى كان رجلاً حياً ستيراً لا يرى من جلده شيء/استحياء منه. [37]

But, as it is mentioned, the importance and quantity of women's covering is greater than this. As the Prophet (sa) states:

«ان خير نساءكم/العفيفة الولود المتبرجة مع زوجها الحصان مع غيره» [38]

Modesty Observance Influence in the Islamic Communities and Men and Women Communication.

Generally, Islamic commands have established some ways for controlling and balancing the sexual instincts. There are some duties for both men and women on modesty behavior. There are several verses which give some commands about modesty and even appropriate covering to wives of Prophets of Islam, but, later, in other verses has been recommend to all women believers. The verses that have clearly reminded about observance of affairs modesty are in chapter 24 (Surah Nur) and 33 (Surah Ahzab).

"O Prophet! Tell your wives and daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks (jalabib) close round them (when they go abroad)..." [39]

³⁶ Boulter, Jeremy, Muhammad and Modesty before God, Islamic Morals and Practices, Published 2006 - Last modified on 04 Oct 2009 Information on <http://www.IslamReligion.com>

³⁷ مسند احمد، ج3، 596 - صحيح البخارى ج4، 129

³⁸ نهج الفصاحة ش 2048

³⁹ احزاب/59

Ibn Rushd in Bidaya al-Mujtahid said that this verse has been adduced as proof that no part of a woman's body should be evident to those who are not among the prohibited degrees of relationship (mahram) or her husband.^[40]

This study attempts to state the importance and impact of observing modesty in our Islamic communication in two dimensions:

1. Spiritual Effects of Modesty in Islamic Communication

1.1. Obtaining to Spiritual Growth through Pure and Humanistic Communications

If modesty, like other God commands, is observed as a duty, that is considered an example of obey of Allah commands and the Prophet's tradition that causes salvation.

و من يطع الله فقد فاز فوزا عظيما. ^[41]

In this context, heart purity and God's pleasure rewards and forgiveness are promised.

يا ايها النبي قل لازواجك بناتك و نساء المومنين يدنين عليهن من جلا بيبيهن ... و كان الله غفورا رحيماً. ^[42]

يا و اذا سألتموهن متاعا فسنلوهن من وراء حجاب نلكم اطهر لقلوبكم و قلوبهن. ^[43]

1.2. To save the Identity Traditional-Religious

Observance of the modesty behaviors on looking, speaking and so on and particularly, lady believers veiling obviously save Muslim identity and advertise Islamic Ritual. Quran demonstrates to this issue:

⁴⁰ Yate, A. *Ibn Rushd: Mujtahid of Europe*, Usury and Markets: Turmverlag. v.1, 1999. p.83

⁴¹ احزاب / 10

⁴² احزاب / 59

⁴³ احزاب / 53

يا ايها النبي قل لازواجك بناتك و نساء المومنين يدنين عليهن ... ادني ان يعرفن

1.3: Maintaining Women Humanity and Mental and Spiritual Values

Of course, the desire to show off lies in the nature of everybody; especially women, due to some reasons, which should be applied in marriage manner; because no tendency exists without direction in human life. So, one of the impacts of "modesty" is emerging a humanistic looking on woman. *Javadi Amoli* writes:

There is no difference between men and women in any dimension for the journey towards perfection levels; the veil is a way to respect and reverence for women so that strangers would not look at them brutish.⁴⁴

But, the reason why the Islamic commands to cover exclusive to women is for the sake of the desire to show off and display one's self as a particular trait of women. She is the hunter in the domination of the hearts of men and man is the prey, whereas man is the hunter in the domination of the body of women and she is the prey. A woman's desire to display herself comes from this essence of the hunter. It is the female instinct, because of her particular nature, wishes to capture hearts and imprison of males. Thus, the deviation begins with the female instinct and therefore the command to cover was issued.^[45] Therefore, the posited difference in nature, temperament and social life of men and women, as Doi (1989) points out, means that more importance is allocated to women's veiling and modesty than to men's modesty.

In fact, woman coverage strengthens imagination and love of men and keeping privacies is one of the mysterious means for maintaining women authorities and statuses against men.

As a matter of fact, wearing veils provide every woman an opportunity to look the same regardless of their beauty and physical appearance. Then minds only reflect to the *human values*; including science, literature, art and ethics and are diligent to obtain them. Thus, veil is reviver of

⁴⁴ 2000، تهران ، سراء ن شر ، زن، أد ینه جلال و جمال ، آملی جوادى ، ع بد الله

⁴⁵ 177 ص .. 1374 فروردین ، 41 چاپ صدرا تاراشتنا، نارھت، ، حجاب مسئله ، مرتضى مطهری،

spiritual values, so observant women prevails moral purities, virtues and prosperities by their modesty. So, of course blatant women are sexually attractive but veiled women rely on their *mental-value*. They prefer to be considered as a *human* with inner virtues and talents apart from their beauty and physical characteristics and before sexual looking, and also want their personal validities to be seen in society.

So a woman has true *bravery* and courage that copes with self-control and avoid her desire of show off, sexy looking to men and lusty make-up decorations in public. So, one of the philosophical foundations of "modesty" is emerging a humanistic looking on woman.

2. Modesty Observance Lead Islamic Communities to Psychological Tranquility.

In fact, the development of modesty observance helps Psychological Tranquility in two forms:

2.1. To treat and dress in a way that allows them to work and study outside their homes equally.

As a matter of fact, wearing veils provide every woman an opportunity to look the same regardless of their beauty and physical appearance. Then minds only reflect to the human values; including science, literature, art and ethics and are diligent to obtain them. Thus, veil is reviver of spiritual values, so, women prevails moral purities, virtues and prosperities by their veil.

They prefer to be considered as a human with virtues and talents apart from their beauty and physical characteristics and before sexual looking, and also want their personal validities to be seen in society.^[46]

According to Islam, people are not only responsible for their faith and deeds, besides they are responsible for the faith and practices of others as well. Every task people do in the communities is effective in societies. If people observe chastity, they will be kept spiritually healthy and clean of purity; and social observance of chastity and veil cause strengthening family

⁴⁶ Ibid

foundation. Because finding the fulfillment of sexual desires behavior can be raised which ends up with delinquency reduction.

Also, within the family environment and within the framework of a legal marriage will strengthen the relationship between a husband and wife causing their union to become more stable.

2.2. To save Islamic Communities from Sexual Harassment.

Observance Women veils cause their health and immunity from invasion.

يا ايها النبي قل لازواجك بناتك و نساء المومنين يدنين عليهن ... ادني ان يعرفن

يا نساء النبي لستن كأحد من النساء إن اتقين فلا تخضعن بالقول فيطمع الذي في قلبه مرض.^[47]

In fact, modesty observance is restrictions of lewd men who attempt to enjoy limitless.

Therefore, Islam is covetous for fixing and organizing sexual relations and then strives towards closing the means used by those evil-minded individuals for exploiting woman and achieving their enjoyment through her as they wish. On the other hand, stretching sexual joys from home-environment to public weakens workforce and social activities.

Without doubt that to fall into this plague and its spread means the destruction of the greatest ingredient for human bliss upon earth and that is purity of progeny and correct lineage. This will lead to destruction of the womb and the end of mercy. For with the spread of illicit sex there is a spread of illegitimate children. When there are many illegitimate children: the family comes to an end; the fabric of society is ripped apart; bonds of love are ended between society's members; selfishness and narcissism becomes wide spread; and hatred and dislike is spread between people. The only feelings that remain are those of possessiveness, power, pleasure, pure self-interest, living for the moment and distancing of oneself from shouldering the

⁴⁷ احزاب / 32

responsibilities of marriage and raising children. This is a warning of the impending destruction, collapse, and loss of mercy, happiness and compassion.^[48]

Conclusion

Considering to chastity and modesty importance is common among divine religions particularly, Islam. As a result, the true modesty can only be attained through faith and the modesty of believers is an outcome of their submissiveness to Allah. Quranic teachings have recommended not only proper and modest behavior in communication of men and women but also about the wearing style of them; particularly in women. It can be seen that, observation of modesty and even covering for women is a suitable field for keeping ethic values in Islamic community.

Modesty can therefore be seen as the means by which morals and ethics in society are maintained and pursued. Shyness from people and society may be a reason to be modest, but this modesty will not remain due to the fact that what is immodest one day in a secular society may be totally acceptable in another. Thus, the key to modesty knows that God is aware of what you do and shying away from that which he forbids. God only desires what is best for us. So to seek what is best for us is to submit to what He has in mind for us.

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⁴⁸ The Wisdom behind The Islamic Laws Regarding Women, Sheikh ‘Abdur-Rahman ‘Abdul-Khaliq, The UN Fourth World Conference on Women I -15th September 1995 Beijing, China.

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