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# Deconstructing Hijabs in Sabyn Javeri's *Hijabistan*

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## Abstract

In the contemporary world of racism and Islamophobia, the Hijab is just the tip of an iceberg, while its meanings are far deeper and more complicated. These heterogeneous meanings of the Hijab and its wearer in the outside world are well handled by Sabyn Javeri, a Pakistani award-winning author and Professor, in her short-story collection called *Hijabistan*. Comprising 16 politically provocative short stories based on the metaphorical interpretation of the veil in the lives of Muslim women, Javeri challenges the single one-dimensional narratives of hijabi identity by presenting the real usage of Hijab in the right and wrong way within the current society. In each story, the Hijab, takes on a new role; for some it becomes a weapon to satisfy one's urges, while for others it functions as a source of patriarchal oppression or a symbol of segregation from mainstream society. There are also a few who wear the Hijab as a badge of honor, while others do not see it as a barrier within their active sexual life. The paper focuses on these multi-dimensional meanings of the Hijab while critically analyzing how the characters achieved their goals while wearing the veil and how some are seeking their identity.

**Keywords:** *Hijab, Identity, Islamophobia, Oppression, Women.*

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## Introduction

The veil is a topic of political discussion in the modern world and serves as a symbol of Muslim identity. The politicization of the veil goes far back in history, and of course, while discussing the complexities of the veil issue, we should not skip the "Othering" of Muslims, especially of Muslim women in Western society. In this regard, Edward Said's *Orientalism* is the most reliable source where Said presents the 'Orient' "as a semi-mythical construct", while the Oriental woman is "no more than a machine; she makes no distinction between one man and another" (Said 187). In fact, they are "less a woman than a display of impressive." (Said 187). On the other hand, Meyda Yegenoglu, the Turkish sociologist, is one step forward in her research as, according to her, the desire to see and penetrate the veil is masculine as she said "the western subject's desire for its oriental other is always mediated by his desire to have access to the space of its woman, to the body of its woman and to the truth of its woman" (Yegenoglu 42). In short, veil is the symbol of the 'exotic other', the wall of segregation separating the exotic 'other' from the civilized occident. Ironically, if we look into the origin of the veil, then Islam was not the first culture to practice veiling. It was started long before the Islamic Prophet Mohammad was born. Societies like Byzantines, Sassanids, and other cultures in the Near and

Middle East practiced veiling as it was a sign of a woman's high status and respectability. The practice of veiling spread throughout the ancient world the same way that many other ideas traveled from place to place during this time: invasion. Therefore, Islam is by no means associated with the practice of veiling from the very start. It is essential to highlight that the term "hijab", which is frequently used, does not mean what is supposed to be the 'scarf' covering Muslim women's hair. Nowhere in the Quran has the term hijab reflected the same meaning. And the semantic and conceptual interpretation of the Quranic term "hijab" shows the opposite of what is supposed to be in reality. The term "hijab" is reiterated seven times in the Quran, referring to the same meaning. "Hijab" means curtain, separation, a wall or anything that hides, masks, and protects something. The term's religious connotation never supports the idea of subjugating women.

Ironically, a thing that did not even originate in Islam has started to represent the entire Muslim *Umma*. In today's world of Islamophobia and racism, it is believed that Islam was intrinsically oppressive of women, and the veil served as an emblem of this oppression, which is assumed to be a "blatant badge of female oppression". Furthermore, it has been argued that veiling mostly caused Muslim civilizations' general backwardness. Thus, in the eyes of the West, wearing a veil represented Islam's backwardness and the subjugation of women. Similar to Colonial times, where the term 'veil' was used as a metaphor for all the backwardness and barbarity of the entire Orient, in the world of the 1990s also, it is a shorthand for all the horrors of Islamic fundamentalism. But it is time to acknowledge that neither the true self nor the true other are what they seem to be. There is no such thing as a 'monolithic Muslim world' in which women are 'monstrously oppressed', any more than there is a single 'Christian world' in which women are liberated. There are no clear-cut borders for misogyny and gender discrimination because they cut over racial, religious, cultural, and geographic divides. Similarly, the Hijab, or 'Islamic veil, carries within its folds a diverse range of multilayered and multifaceted meanings that are often hard to detect.

While Westerners perceive the Hijab as a burden for Muslim women, it is also evident that some women choose to wear it voluntarily. The responses of those women are diverse, as their account of veiling stretches from religiously inspired arguments through reasons of convenience and opposition against stereotypes and discrimination. Most minority women see the veil as a way of affirming their cultural identity, a way of opposing the dominant worldview of non-Muslim people, as "the women wearing it being found to contradict what are supposed to be their interests and the truth about themselves as told by others" (Berger 93). Hence, it would not be a crime to take some time to reflect on these women's motivation, where the veil plays a major role rather than a mere piece of garment, a piece of cloth that often carries within its fold much more than meets the eye.

## Method

The methodology used in the study is qualitative, concentrating on close reading, interpretation, and in-depth analysis of the select text by Sabyn Javeri. The study relied mainly on secondary sources like books, articles, and journals for data collection. The study is supported by a significant number of critical writings which deal with the complexities of the Hijab in the outside world, and also the books that deal with the feminine or female perspective



of Islam- are my concern. Besides books, the study also consulted numerous articles and interviews available on the topic of Hijab, Sabyn Javeri, Pakistani fiction, Islamic feminism, Islamophobia, and gender issues, respectively. To make the interpretations more significant and relevant, the study tried to work within the specific guidelines of feminist theories. Relying on the socio-cultural studies on the subject, the present study intends to examine the politics of Hijab as represented in Sabyn Javeri's *Hijabistan*, demonstrating how the short-story collection fictionalizes many of the competing discourses which have surrounded the question of *Hijab* in recent decades. The study also focuses on the representation of Muslim women down the ages and their eventful journey from compliance to interrogation. The methodology advocated by the MLA handbook for writers of Resource Paper, eighth edition- has been followed for the purpose of documentation, quotation, and work citation.

#### Results and Discussions

Sabyn Javeri, a Karachi-based creative writer and Professor, believes that “we are living in such an age of information overloaded that when we write and read, it should be absorbing enough to hold our attention” (Javeri Interview). In an increasingly polarized world, what would be more absorbing than the tale of some silenced women, who are often misrepresented for their dress code—an out-of-the-box subject that is the central idea behind Javeri's popular short-story collection called *Hijabistan*, a compilation of 16 short stories where the Hijab is used as a metaphor for all the hidden truths that the protagonists are concealing, and the wars they are fighting within, away from the prying eyes of the world. During an interview with the National, Javeri said “The reality of the hijab is so much more complex than people give it credit for” (Javeri Interview) and in an attempt to uncover the many layers of the Hijab that extend beyond the symbolic head cloth, she delves deep. All Sixteen short stories down the line revolve around certain hijabi women, ranging from the angelic to the sinister, who show potential to conquer the universe but are unable to ignore patriarchal injunctions or fight societal stereotyping. The narratives that span from Pakistan to London want to show a different side of the Hijab where a hijabi isn't necessarily a submissive doormat' but an active fashionista who, “behind those tents, wore anyway?” Through sixteen short stories, Javeri explores the various experiences and identities that make up a Muslim woman's life. The stories' plots range from a young kleptomaniac who injects excitement into her otherwise repressed life by stealing lipsticks and flashing men through her burka to a married Pakistani woman having an extramarital affair. Further, it also includes a wife in London who decides to embrace the Hijab out of her own choice and strong faith. This is how the stories avoid falling into the strong/weak and good/bad clichés that female characters are frequently made to conform to. It dispels the overdone opposition between the meek, obedient, conservative lady who is a victim of oppression and the modern, liberal woman who is liberated from her headscarf.

In the opinion of Saba Mahmood, a well-renowned Islamic scholar, the veil works as an assurance for the integrity of women and protection from being used as a sexual object by predators, predators; in fact, “women who wear the niqab (full face and body veil) understand their practice to accord with a strict interpretation of Islamic edicts on female modesty, and often see themselves as more virtuous than women who wear the Khimar( the veil that covers the head and torso) or the hijab (headscarf)” (Mahmood 43). In short, the more one is





covered/veiled, the more she becomes chaste. This assumption is punctured in Javeri's grandest opening short story, *The Dates*, which captures the fine nuances of the life of a triumphant hijabi who feels empowered through sex, shunning her inhibitions but not her Hijab. It opens with a highly risqué scene that shows "a middle-aged man and a young woman struggling with each other" (Javeri 5). A feminist may perceive it as an aggressive intrusion of male sex roles on women in positions of less authority. Still, the author verifies that "it wasn't what you think it was," much to the utter dismay of such a mind further, "he wasn't particularly forceful and she not shy. What was taking place was actually in custom with what tradition demanded" (Javeri 5). The whole situation began with a headscarf that a young woman's married boss gave her to shield her "from prying eyes" (Javeri 7). But who exactly does she need to be saved from? Or "Does she want to be saved?"- These are the queries that frequently leave one perplexed. The headscarf, figuratively presented to the young lady as a self-defense weapon, ultimately turns her into a sexual object of desire. Javeri's Hijab has a dual function in this situation. On the one hand, it is a token of love, a love that ultimately ends after one-night stand, while on the other side, for the young woman, it is a matter of belonging; it is something that made her feel that at least she matters to someone, as "there were very few occasions in her life when she had received gifts..." (Javeri 6). Further, the Hijab becomes a part of the conspiracy, as the cunning and manipulative boss of the young lady has used it as bait to entrap her.

The Plot First Moves in the planned course, with the reader expected to see the typical scene of a powerless lady falling prey to the clutches of a strong guy. However, the plot takes a drastic turn as both characters are disappointed by their expectations. In her boss's eyes, the young woman is just like any other shy, religious, and devout Pakistani hijabi girl. This presumption is correct since, in today's society, wearing a hijab is a gauge of virginity; in fact, the Hijab is the equivalent of Islam's sixth pillar, following the Shahada's traditional "five pillars." Some women willingly choose to wear Hijab because they "claim that its wearing is a religious gesture; and that it conforms more to the religious law of Islam than any other available dress" (William, 53). So, the decision to cover the heads is based on the invitations to practice Islam 'better.' Therefore, it has become a criterion that to be a good woman, one needs to wear Hijab, something that makes her a practicing Muslim. The young woman's supervisor finally moves to invite her into a remote flat with these expectations in mind. His intention is clear to the lady, who accepts the proposal without a second thought. In the isolated apartment, the Hijab's ambiguity becomes apparent as it can hide only the young woman's body. Still, her bodily pleasures and desires are explicit in the touch of a man, the only person who "made her feel wanted. Even if only for a few minutes" (Javeri 11). Just with the end of the "greatly anticipated adventure" (Javeri 8), as the young woman calls it, everything gets normal in her life, nothing extraordinary, and nothing special. In fact, "in a moment she had transformed into just about any other woman on the streets of Karachi making her way home after a hard day's work, plodding away at a mundane, office job" (Javeri 11). On the other hand, her boss, who was once a protector, after the sexual intercourse, is transformed into "no different from any other man" (Javeri 11). At the same time, his token of love, i.e., Hijab, is tossed ruthlessly on the floor. His hypocrisy is at its peak when he starts teaching the young woman what is permissible and impermissible in Islam.



Noticing the pubic hair of the lady, he says, “You wear an abaya, a hijab, you probably pray five times a day, but you don’t remove your pubic hair?...isn’t that impure? Napak? Against sunnah? What is that Hadith? Hair should not be longer than a grain of rice” (Javeri 10). Ironically, a man who doesn't care about a woman's chastity and won't think twice about dragging young ladies into bed to satisfy his needs converses about what is ethically right or wrong. The young woman, whose boisterous laughing makes one think of a lioness, is comforted that at least he thought of her as pious, one who prays five times a day- “it was sweet of him to think she dressed modestly and probably prayed five times. It was sweet of him to think.....to think that she was pious. Pure” (Javeri 11). In this instance, the boss is comparable to her family, who shared her hijab-wearing decision. Receiving the amount of her service from the boss whose money can buy anything, she leaves for her bus where “she camouflaged herself amidst the other veiled women, all shrinking into themselves, willing their bodies to become invisible and unfeeling to the pinching and grouping that no number of hijabs and burkhas seemed to deter” (Javeri 12). Therefore, shunning the outdated assumptions of a hijabi where it is assumed that “all look the same” (Javeri 12), here we have one whose clothing doesn’t come into her way of living.

For those who used to display the female body as right and appropriate, “covering it” suppresses femininity and beauty. The often drab-looking garments of covered Muslim women show that their femininity and sexuality are being denied. Contrary to such opinions, Javeri’s protagonist never intermixes her faith with her desires. Just like we all have our interpretations of the Quran, her interpretation never comes into her way of living. Interestingly, the Hijab, apart from hiding the face of the woman from the outside world, also hides her desires and longings, her yearnings to be accepted and respected. When she finds someone promising those unexpected things, the barriers of dos and don’ts are shattered. However, in the world of patriarchy, when all hopes are futile, instead of grudging over the oppressive role of the Hijab, she celebrates the anonymity that comes with it. Her relationship with Hijab is quite transgressive, as she does a discursively complex work of contextualizing the Hijab in a culture where veiling is not taken for granted in the way high-heeled shoes and pushup bras are. She constructs the Hijab as liberating, as opposed to the occidental viewpoint, where freedom and emancipation characterize the Western neoliberal individual rather than the veiled Muslim. First, by asserting her commitment to the Islamic prescription of veiling, she enunciates religious agency while, at the same time, positioning herself as an individual who wants to follow her inclinations. Her veiled body hybridizes personal freedom, celebrated in Western culture, with a commitment to modest dressing, which is valued in Islam. In this sense, making sense of her commitment to veiling, she positions herself as “neither the one nor the other” (Bhabha 178). She constructs her relationship with the Hijab neither from the culturally established position of the occidental feminist defying the patriarchal regulation of women’s bodies nor from the paradigmatic opposite, i.e., the position of the oriental woman sacrificing her personal liberation. Instead, for her, Hijab is a way of retreating from the disappointing world, a little sanctuary of her own that no one dares to inhabit.

However, the Hijab constricts as it liberates, and the same thing is visible in Javeri’s next short story, *The Urge*, where a young kleptomaniac used to steal “fire engine red lipsticks” (Javeri 15) from shops and hides them under her tent like abaya. Tired of her old tricks to



remove boredom, she takes up a new adventure of flashing men from the balcony. So, the story that begins in a naive and infantile manner frequently takes a radical turn when a 13-year-old child is transformed into a strong woman, and therefore, innocence is replaced by some crude experience.

"It all began the day they put the all-encompassing dark garment on me. It was a passage to womanhood, they said. Now that I am older, I must wear a hijab. And an abaya too. I must be good. A good Muslim. A good, Muslim, woman" (Javeri 13) - this is how the story begins, where the protagonist, just like all other women, has to pay off certain prices to be a woman, to be a good Muslim woman. Generally, in the world of gender hierarchy, the word woman has the same implications as the word other. A woman is not a person in her own right. She is man's other: she is less than a man; she is a kind of alien in a man's world; she is not a fully developed human being the way a man is. In fact, *The Urge has taken up the same confused women identity as the story's subject matter*.

The "all-encompassing dark garment" (Javeri 13) i.e., Hijab, becomes a reality for a girl in the veil just at 13. For some time, she is like the young woman of *The Dates* who enjoy the anonymity, the privacy that comes with the Hijab as "it was, in some ways, like traveling in your own private marquee. I felt sheltered" (Javeri 14). When reality hits her hard, and the colour black makes her life incredibly tedious, that fantasy quickly ends. She gradually realizes that beneath "the ideology of veiling," there lies the motif of "covering and controlling women" (Brien 110). Instead of complaining, she is told to accept it as her fate and also advised to "make the best of it" (Javeri 15). However, the child within her doesn't die quickly; it becomes obedient with time. Finding a companion in her new aunt, who is just six years older than her, she starts to give in to her urges. Initially, the urges were material, but gradually they became physical as the two young girls, driven by strange urges, got closer, as if something had happened to them. They do not talk but let their instinctive movements speak for themselves— one hand in another's breasts, who is equally unshy of the latter's interference. However, their amorous expedition ends drastically as her crude uncle suddenly enters and gives his ordeal of not entering the aunt's room again, further, the aunt's "face matched the violet of her dress.....it was her fate" (Javeri 18).

Later, her urge takes a different shape, and she starts to flush her nearby shopkeepers. This continues until her mother catches her one day; eventually, punishment comes, and she is told to marry the shopkeeper she used to flash from her balcony. Thus, she becomes "a man's honor, but not his pride" (Javeri 21). Even after marriage, their conjugal relationship is equally disastrous as the relationship becomes one of a colonizer-colonized type wherein the colonizer, as if on an imperial offensive, tries to possess and extend his powers to use and abuse this occupied territory. The practice of controlling starts with her clothes- "The hijab was not enough for him. He made me wrap a large chaddar over my hijab and abaya" (Javeri 20). In fact, here, the Hijab becomes a "constant remainder... of stifling morality that makes Muslim men the owners of women" (Ali xi).

Further, his masculine ego is not satisfied with this alone; he later imprisons her literally because "the body must not only be covered up, it must be locked up" (Javeri 20). His overbearingness is such that he locks his wife up even on the day when their daughter is born, lying in a pool of blood. Realizing the hopelessness of her daughter's future, who is not the



provider but a liability to society, the protagonist takes the final step of murdering her own child- "I had squeezed the cloth around her too tight. She was turning blue..... 'It was her fate,' I said as the baby's neck flopped to one side. I pulled the Hijab over her tiny mouth and nostrils. The urge, you see, was much too strong" (Javeri 21-22). So, the story that starts childishly ends with the murder of an infant, and the Hijab, which was once used to hide one's honour, now becomes a weapon to challenge suppression. By telling the story of a triumphant hijabi who was once silenced but learns bravery through experience, Javeri once more demonstrates that a "woman in a hijab is only covering her body and hair, not her voice and intellect" (Mogahed Interview).

It is equally undeniable that in the world of racism and Islamophobia, to make the divide between the East and West salient, westerners often "signify the oriental women as mysterious and exotic... feminine, always veiled, seductive, and dangerous" (Lentin 155). By portraying the oriental woman as strange and mysterious, westerners began to associate every aspect of her life with wickedness. Since the veil, in particular, was viewed as something that differentiated the 'bizarre' Eastern woman from the 'superior' Western woman, the veil ultimately became portrayed as an object that has led to both the Orient's oppression and her inferior state. Therefore, the veil becomes a wall of segregation that separates the more civilized 'us' from the uncivilized 'them.' Concentrating on the backward status of the Muslim 'other' in the western world, Javeri's two stories from the collection, *A World without Men* and *The Hijab and Her*, try to capture the humiliations that a hijabi has to go through in an Alien country where their identities constantly stay on the radar. In *A World without Men*, a white professor of English literature finds her stereotypes about Muslim women challenged continuously by a veil-wearing student, Saira. Though at the start, Saira is quite invisible, and to her English teacher, she is a "girl with no face" (Javeri 55), later on, the same girl becomes a source of comfort as "her black and white world is uncomplicated and untouched by the complexities of colour" (Javeri 61). The white Professor articulates the conventional Western view that a woman in *niqab* is oppressed, in fact, to her, a woman in *niqab* is "masquerading as a non-person...black pyramid, a negation of human figure" (Bullock 46), but her thoughts are all the time challenged when the truth behind the hidden one is revealed. Be it the glossy heels of veiled Saira or living alone in a girls dorm, all the unexpected revelations forced the Young Professor to question her understanding of veiled women. Here Javeri wants to highlight how society constitutes women as a group outside any contextual social/political/ economic relations in which they live in and then universalizes the oppression of women to apply to all women. All that is needed is to find a group of powerless women to "prove the general point that women as a group are powerless" (Mohanty 499). And the veiled woman is taken by this approach to be the example *par excellence* of the powerless women, and further, it is supposed "her oppression.... becomes a symbol of difficulty all women once faced" (Mohanty 499). Though Saira is conflicted by her sexuality and creates a narrative that may help her either come to terms with or escape her quandary, in her teacher's words, "everything is a story," and we are made up of stories. Stories that we tell others, stories we tell ourselves, and stories that we don't want anyone to know" (Javeri 67) seem to console her. So both the women rely on each other to break stereotypes and gender disparities, while the veil plays the role of something "like a shadow, constant and comforting, attached yet detached" (Javeri 68). Similarly, in *The Hijab and Her*, the young



protagonist Nasira becomes a victim of racism at the hands of her racist Professor, who, as she reveals, "by some strange instinct felt as if the Professor were mocking her. And more specifically, her headscarf" (Javeri 104). The Professor tried every possible means to make Nasira feel small and unimportant, as her Hijab became a lens through which external observers interpreted or misapprehended Muslim women. Her humiliation and disgrace are such that they turn her to the internet to search for ISIS. So, in short, it is not Islam that is responsible for her turn to terrorism; instead, it is the response that Nasira receives from the outside world that ultimately leads her to the verge of terrorism.

In *Only in London*, the author uses excerpts from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* to describe the British-Pakistani Diaspora, where the condition of the immigrant protagonist is like "sailing in two boats, trying to be both" (Javeri 122). Being an author, Javeri questions the immigrant experience of a liberal Pakistani unable to live up to the stereotyped expectations of the West as an oppressed woman and, at the same time, finds herself unable to fit into the conservative Pakistani community of a ghetto-like neighborhood. In other stories like *Radha*, *The Full Stop*, *Malady of Heart*, *The Girl Who split in Two*, and *The Adulteress*, Hijab is not present in its literal sense. Still, it becomes quite metaphorical, symbolizing the untold female urges that are always hidden from the external world. Among those abovementioned stories, *The Full Stop* is one that deals with a strong subject, circling around the stigma of menstruation. In the story, the young protagonist Assia getting her first period, suddenly realizes that her life is way different from that of all the Western protagonists in her favorite American adult books. In the world of patriarchy, while for boys becoming a man is a matter of honor, for girls becoming a woman has always had disastrous consequences. As for Assia, who has crossed the boundary that separates a girl from a woman, the moment of revelation comes with her father's dismay and embarrassment. During this epiphanic moment, she questions the hypocrisies of the traditional Muslim societies where-

"Menstruation was a thing to be hushed, veiled and concealed- not celebrated. It was the moment when honour was replaced by shame, friendship with humiliation, and love by fear. For girls in her part of the world, pads were concealed in brown paper bags like counterfeits, films on the subject were banned, and the denial of a natural state was encouraged. They were called impure, napak, and unclean. This was not something to be discussed.....not now, not ever. And so, in that one moment as she saw her father turn away from her and her mother in denial, Assia found clarity. She knew now why it was called the period. Because, like a full stop, this moment in a girl's life put an end to all conversations" (Javeri 79).

Like menstruation, sex is another topic that remains a dirty word in conservative patriarchal societies, whereas saying it is just the same as doing it. In conservative societies like Pakistan, where any discourse about sex is taboo, acknowledging a woman's sexual desire is a direct route to hell. Much to the utter dissatisfaction of such a society, Javeri in her short story *Radha*, deals with a prostitute whose dignity is smashed to the pleasure of wealthy and famous men of her so-called honorable community. In all these stories, Hijab is not used explicitly, but metaphorically it is a curtain over our desires and wants, the divider between us and them, men and women, women and women. Though Javeri is severely criticized for this metaphorical



handling of the Hijab, her tongue and cheek reply to all these allegations is equally interesting. In the words of Javeri-

"Not all the stories were written with the theme of Hijab in mind in this collection, as it includes many of my older stories. It's when I was collating the collection that I realized the Hijab, or my fascination with it as an enabler or an oppressor, has been present throughout my journey as a writer. I have always been fascinated with how we relate the Hijab with piety, though different women have different reason for wearing. And we automatically assume that a woman who doesn't take the Hijab will be modern or non-religious. These binaries have always fascinated me. The idea of boxing people according to their religious identity has been present in much of my earlier work as well. So, I thought I should include those works that reflect the theme of the veil as a metaphor for suppression" (Javeri Interview).

### Conclusion

Javeri's short-story collection not only deals with the Hijab as a mere piece of cloth but also deals with the various nuances of the hijabi identity.' This collection takes us to the diverse worlds straddled by hijabis with conflicting privileges, where everyone is on their own journey and has their relationship with the Hijab. Narratives of maids and mistresses, mothers and daughters, women who choose the Hijab, and those on whom it is thrust all find space in Javeri's universe. Borrowing from the author's experiences, Javeri once said, "Life in Karachi and London has taught me that as a society, we're obsessed with what women wear, and how we make clothes the central focus of her identity and the barometer of her morality" (Javeri Interview). Therefore, being aware of the politicization of the Hijab, she not only describes it as a 'walking representation of Islam' but also focuses on 'veiling as a lived experience full of contradictions and multiple meanings'. Her Hijab was more than a physical garment; as she said, "It was the metaphorical hijab that I wanted to explore" (Javeri Interview). Indeed, Javeri's collection postulates a positive theory of the Hijab by deftly refuting both the widely held belief that Muslim women are completely subjugated by men and the more nuanced arguments advanced by liberal feminists like Fatima Mernisi, Mcleod, and others who have sought to criticize women's decisions to cover as ultimately being "un-liberating." In line with these critics, this collection, which puts forward the case that the judgment of the veil as being an oppressive feature of Islam, is based on liberal understandings of 'equality' and 'liberty' that preclude other ways of thinking about 'equality' and 'liberty' which would offer a more positive approach for contemplating the wearing of the veil. In each of her stories, Javeri's collection reveals that in a consumer capitalist culture, the Hijab can be experienced as a liberation from the tyranny of the male hegemony and the concept of the thin ideal woman.

Javeri is also the first author to boldly say, "Judge my book by its cover" (Javeri Interview). The tongue-in-cheek orange cover features an image of a woman wearing a full black outfit from head to toe, sporting a pair of rainbow-colored sunglasses, and sucking on a melting orange Popsicle bearing the words FEMST. It has the kind of captivating cover that compels one to buy the book immediately and dive into its pages immediately. The image's most intriguing aspect is that it completely exposes the author's true intentions while still leaving the reader's interpretation of the cover-up. Thus, Javeri's collection is significant because this picture and the range of heroines she includes in her works also capture the current battle for feminism.



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