

The burqa debate: “To ban or not to ban?”

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How do we know when a state oversteps its bounds? When do we, as the citizens of any state, determine how far a government can intervene in our personal lives? When France decides to ban the burqa, that's when I, personally, feel a state is exceeding its scope of power. Having established that, let this scribe clarify that I, on an individual level, could not even contemplate covering my head, let alone wearing a burqa. However, it is this sort of personal choice and freedom to it that I stand for. This is simply because of the fact that every individual has a right to choose how they dress.

The response towards this ban has been extremely shocking, as a large majority of Pakistani “liberals” have made a number of inane remarks. In order to understand why the burqa should not have been banned, we must address these issues. Firstly, to claim that the burqa is a symbol of Islam and France being a secular state should be allowed to make its own decisions pertaining to its ban, is rather unfounded. Tracing back the origin of the burqa, one must realize that it is not an Islamic tradition. Infact, it originated from the Hindu Caste system when Brahmic men did not want their women to be looked at by lower caste men. Therefore, culminating in the development of Burqa. Moreover, not all individuals wear a burqa to preserve religious sanctity, as such. To many women, the burqa embodies emancipation from the process of globalization and predominant western imperialism (I would advise readers to observe Helen Watson's study of personal responses of Muslim women, in the UK, to wearing the burqa). Hence, to claim it is an Islamic symbol doesn't have much ground because this cannot be generalized.

Furthermore, even if it is an Islamic symbol now, the fact remains that, by banning it, France is only going to damage its own society. This is essentially because Islamophobia in the world is on a steady rise. By banning an “Islamic Symbol,” this phobia is being made a reality and would actually cause mass polarization within the French society.

On a second level, when people make claims such as those regarding how Muslim women, not in favour of this reform, should leave France, it reflects their ignorance. Reverting back to the 1800s when colonization was at its peak and the French had colonized half the world, the reason they brought all these Muslims in from their colonies was because they required cheap labour. Now that these Muslims have citizenship, they seem to be socially persecuted due to their appearance. The fact is that not wearing the burqa wasn't a pre-condition for granting these women citizenship. Therefore, as they have been given this nationality, they have a right to live there and be respected just as much as anyone else.

Lastly, there is something we must clarify to ourselves. A secular state is one in which state affairs have nothing to do with religious dogmas or beliefs. France has a very strong White Christian culture which they are trying to preserve by banning the burqa. In doing so, they are depicting their hypocrisy. If they wish to act like a liberal, secular and multicultural society, then they need to allow such personal freedoms. If they cannot do so, they should not create these facades of liberalism.

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P.S.

* From Let Us Build Pakistan:

<http://criticalppp.com/archives/46357>