

Islam and Purdah in Ibadan of Nigeria: Muslim Women Ordeal and Economic Empowerment

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Islam as a way of life encompasses inter-alia the economic life of its adherents both male and female. There have been arguments for and against Muslim women engagement in economic activities since they are placed by law under the control and care of their husbands. To those that strictly adhere to the view that women are to be catered for by their husbands, women wield no economic power. While the other party sees women engagement in economic activities as legitimate and a way of equipping them to be able to contribute their own quotas in form of assistance in the running and development of the family. Purdah or Veiling of Muslim women is a practice in Islam, it has been seen by many even within the fold of Islamic Ummah in Ibadan as one of the factors militating against the human rights of Muslim women as it is seen to be infringing on the multiple socio-economic roles they are expected to play in reforming the society. Worse still, a few Islamic groups in recent times have argued that Islam obliges Muslim women to cover their faces. Thus, female apparels as a matter of virtue has elicited debate in the Muslim Ummah as some members have resorted to castigating Muslim women who fail to wear face-veil (niqob) which they consider to be the only acceptable proper Islamic dress. Therefore, keeping of women in purdah which is believed to be observance of religious obligation has caught Muslim women between modesty and economic struggle for survival. There have been efforts at economic empowerment of women Nigeria. Such efforts started with the inauguration of the National Commission for Women Affairs and recently, Ministry of Women Affairs. This paper therefore seeks to study the response of the Muslim women to the economic empowerment programmes between 1985 and 1995. This study relies on gender theory using Islamic Feminism as tool of analysis. Also, it relies on oral interview with Muslim women and men alike, published works, and official documents. The study covers the 11 Local Government Areas that make up Ibadan land.