



## SKIN PROTECTION

When in public, the traditional Rohingya woman is veiled from head-to-toe: a *burka* (robe) covers her body, and a *hijab* (headscarf) covers chest, head, neck and hair. Her face is veiled by a *niqab* (face veil), and she carries aloft a *sathi* (umbrella) — which functions as a fashion accessory, skin protection, and instrument of *purdah*. She wears *hath mooza* (gloves) and *tañg mooza* (socks). Only her eyes are visible.

In South Asia, the social and religious tradition of secluding women for the family honor is called *purdah*. A Rohingya woman who does not maintain *purdah* —through both physical separation (women's spaces vs men's spaces) and appropriately modest clothing— risks bringing shame to her family. However, the level of 'veiling' varies by social class, education, age and location. Educated Rohingya women from urban families, for example, may wear the *hijab* but not the *burka* and *niqab*, while rural Rohingya women tend to be completely fully veiled. Rohingya girls enter *purdah* when reach sexual maturity, and their families and communities —particularly *maulvis* (religious teachers)— enforce it strictly through their peak childbearing years. The purity of teen girls is closely

safeguarded through *purdah*, while older Rohingya women are less scrutinized.

### **Burka (robe)**

Most Rohingya women wear the *burka*, especially in rural parts. Even non-religious Rohingya women may wear it to avoid being shamed by their communities. In earlier times, it is said that Rohingya women wore white *burkas* sewn by local Rohingya tailors, consisting of a large white cloth draped from head to feet, leaving only two windows for eyes. Later, Rohingya women wore *doloin burka*, meaning rice pounder *burka*. Like a *doloin*, this style of *burka* has two part: a top part covering the head to waist, and a bottom part covering the waist to feet. *Doloin burka* are black. They are rarely worn today.

Today, Rohingya women prefer modern *burkas* from Saudi Arabia or other Asian countries. Saudi *burkas* are expensive but the most preferred. They vary from 30,000-50,000 Myanmar kyat (\$21-35 USD) based on quality and designs. Saudi *burkas* are black. Young women also like Bangladeshi *burkas* because of their modern designs that reveal their beauty, and the range of colors.

### **Hijab** (headscarf)

Most rural Rohingya women wear the *burka* outside their home, but many Rohingya women in towns like Sittwe (Akyub), Maruak Oo, Kyauk Pyu, May Bon, Paunk Taw and Min Pya only wear the *hijab*. They follow a more liberal interpretation of Islamic requirements of women's modesty and believe that wearing *hijab* is enough. The *hijab* is worn in the presence of adult males outside the family. Rohingya women prefer *hijab* made in Asian countries including Bangladesh. They can cost 5,000-20,000 Myanmar kyat (\$4-14 USD)

### **Niqab** (face veil)

The *niqab* is a face veil with an opening for the eyes. A separate eye veil may be added. Rohingya women, especially young women, typically wear *niqab* with their *burka*. Most Muslim scholars, however, do not believe that Islam requires women to cover their faces, so not all Rohingya women practice this, especially older women or the *hijab*-wearing more liberal Rohingya women.

### **Hath mooza & tañg mooza** (gloves & socks)

Similarly, most Islamic scholars agree that Qur'anic teachings do not require women to cover their hands and feet. The Rohingya, however, tend to follow a very conservative Islamic that teaches that women must cover all parts of their body and lower their voices so that strangers cannot hear them. So most Rohingya women wear *hath mooza* and *tañg mooza*, but many older or more liberal women do not.

### **Sathi** (umbrella)

All Rohingya women in Myanmar carry a *sathi* when outside, even liberal Rohingya women. The *sathi* allows Rohingya women to maintain *purdah* wherever they go. It is also used as fashion accessory and sun umbrella throughout Myanmar, among Buddhist communities and Muslim. Umbrellas help women stay cool and protect from the sun and rain. They can be found in many beautiful designs and colors.

