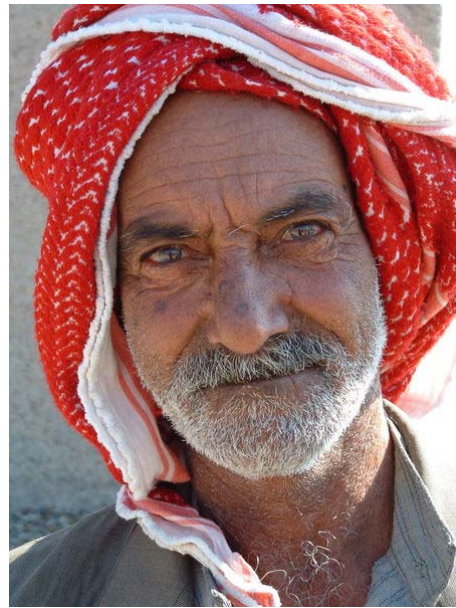


# Middle Eastern Dress Vocabulary

## Male Dress:

**Thawb**— an ankle-length garment, usually with long sleeves, similar to a robe. The thawb has alternate spellings (*thoub* and *thobe*), as well as alternate names (*khameez* or *dishdashah*). Wearing the thawb expresses equality and it is also perfectly suited to the hot climate.

**Bisht**— a long white, brown or black cloak trimmed in gold that is worn over the thawb. It is also known as a *mishlah*.



**Keffiyeh**— a traditional headdress of the Middle East, made of a square cloth, folded and wrapped into various styles around the head. There are many local variations of the keffiyeh. Some wearers wrap the keffiyeh into a turban, while others wear it loosely draped around the back and shoulders. It is usually made of white cotton (popular in the Gulf states); however, there are also checkered pattern in red (usually associated with Jordan) or black (usually associated with the Levant – Israel, Lebanon, Palestinian territories, Egypt, and Syria). The keffiyeh is commonly found in arid climates to provide protection from the sun, as well as for occasional use in protecting the mouth and eyes from blowing dust and sand. The keffiyeh has various spellings (*kaffiyah*, *keffiya*, *kaffiya*, or *kufiya*), as well as alternate names (*shmagh/shemagh*, *ghutra*, or *hatta*).

**Tagiyah**— a skullcap sometimes worn under the keffiyeh to keep it from slipping.

**Agal**— a thick, doubled, black cord that holds the keffiyeh in place. Some men may choose not to wear the agal. This item originated as a "camel hobble" used to whip camels in the legs as an obedience tool. It was additionally used as an impromptu "parking brake" for the camel, which was slipped over a front knee to prevent the camel

from running off when no stable or tie-off was available. In modern times, this item has become decorative in nature and no longer serves this functional purpose.

## Female Dress:

**Thawb**— loose, long-sleeved, ankle-length garments like men wear. However, for women, the neck and front can be embroidered and decorated with beads.

**Salwar** — cotton or silk pants worn under the thawb.

**Abaya**— a large, black cloak worn over the thawb either loose and flowing or wrapped around the body. In Iran the abaya is called a *chador*. Sometimes instead of wearing a thawb under their abaya, women sport fashionable clothing. Dress in the Middle East reflect a woman’s environment, traditions, heritage, religious beliefs, and the personality of her society, along with her own personal taste and fashion trends. In places like Kuwait, there is no dress code, and most women dress in “western” clothes. They may also choose from an array of various traditional and modest dress, along with a variety of head coverings. In Tunisia, women are expected to wear modest dress, but they are not required to wear a hijāb (headscarf). However, women, in places like Iran, must meet government dress requirements for modest dress by wearing a combination of a hijāb (headscarf) and a long overcoat which conceals the arms and legs or an abaya. The overcoat is known by a French word, *manteau*. At home among family members, most women do not wear the abaya.





**Hijāb**— the distinctive headscarf that is tied tightly around the head and tucked in at the back to conceal the hair while also covering part of the forehead, but leaving the face unveiled. There are many versions of the hijāb that are worn in numerous ways. In Pakistan and India, the *dupatta* (also known as *chunri* and *chunni*) has long been a symbol of modesty and has been used as a hijāb to cover the head. The Islamic meaning of the word hijāb actually means “modesty” and refers to the responsibility men and women have to retain their modesty by preventing physical attraction from the opposite sex. Since men and women have different physical attributes that attract the opposite sex, there are differing rules of modesty. Both sexes must lower their eyes when encountering someone of the opposite sex. Men must be covered from the shoulders to the knees, while women must cover everything except the hands, feet, and face.

**Niqāb**— a veil that covers the face. Some women in the Middle East wear a veil as part of their hijāb, while others do not. It is popular in the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf but it can also be found in North Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Indian subcontinent. There are innumerable styles of niqāb.





There are generally two types of niqāb. The first is a length of fabric worn around the head that leaves the eyes, and occasionally the forehead, visible (“half” niqāb). The second is a total face cover consisting of an upper band that is tied around the forehead, together with a long wide piece which covers the face, leaving an opening for the eyes (“full” or “gulf-style” niqāb). In Saudi Arabia, women are required to wear the abaya and hijāb, while the niqāb is required for Muslim women but optional for other women. Many also have a second or more sheer cover that is attached to the upper band, and is worn flipped down to cover the eyes.

**Burqa**— a less common style of niqāb, the burqa is composed of many yards of light material pleated around a cap that fits over the top of the head. There is an embroidered openwork grille where the burqa passes over the eyes. The enveloping outer garment cloaks the entire body. It is worn over the usual daily clothing (often a long dress or a *salwar kameez*—tunic and pants set) and removed when the woman returns to the sanctuary of the household. The burqa is almost solely found in Afghanistan and certain areas of Pakistan and India.

