

CHAPTER FIVE

Why do women have to cover themselves?

Some think that women are oppressed because they have to cover themselves from head to toe and can't dress as they want to. Let me explain the reason and remove the misconception.

Given the characteristics and dispositions with which Allah (The Exalted) created His servants, male and female, we find that the attributes in a man that arouse a woman's desires are different from the attributes in a woman that arouse a man's desires. Accordingly, the divine law applies differently in this area to women on one hand and to men on the other. Nevertheless, certain rulings in this same area are equal for men and women, for example, both men and women are required to conceal the area between the navel and the knee, since the potential temptation represented by this area of the body is equal for both genders.ⁱ

It may be said that masculinity and femininity per se have nothing to do with the differences which exist in Islamic law between the duties assigned to men and women. Rather, the differences, when they arise, are due to external events and circumstances. Moreover, we have seen that such events and circumstances can result in rulings which differ even from one man to another or from one woman to another.

Islamic Law

According to the Islamic law after a boy becomes mature, the same rule applies of looking at men (meaning for one man to look at another is no problem unless with lustful intent), however, if he is beautiful and handsome then the same rule applies as looking at women, meaning to look at him with lust and desire is forbidden.ⁱⁱ

Another ruling in the books of law, we find that a pious woman should try to protect herself from immoral women, meaning not to take the veil off and a Muslim woman should not uncover her body (Satr¹) in front of non-Muslim women (or immoral Muslim women too).² The reason being is that so the immoral woman does not describe her to another man who can get satisfaction from the description.

So we find that it is not just women who have to cover themselves from men, but at times they have to cover themselves from other women too.

Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) (upon whom be peace) would cover himself in the court of the kings where there were all males. His beauty was amazing to the extent that the women of Egypt had cut their fingers whilst cutting something else without realising because of looking at the beauty of his face.ⁱⁱⁱ

So Islam is protecting the dignity and respect of women in the society and not favouring men. It is a scientific fact that men are more easily affected by visual stimuli, which is why the extent of women's covering (Awrah) is greater than men's, but the fact remains that men are also supposed to behave and dress modestly.

Scenario

Imagine a woman appears at this academic gathering in full adornment, as it were, displaying many of her physical charms the way "liberated" women generally do today. Given this scenario, what do you suppose will happen when a woman whose appearance is this alluring gets up to discuss an intellectual issue, a social dilemma, or a literary work?

What is bound to happen is that in the case of the men who see and hear this woman, their instinctual desires will be aroused to such an extent that they interfere with their intellectual process. In other words, they will be so distracted by the speaker's physical charms that they will not absorb what she is saying and the intellectual message she is seeking to deliver. On the contrary, the speaker will be proceeding along one track while these men are being carried by their instinctual impulses along another. What this means, clearly, is that the men are only relating to this woman, despite the scientific or intellectual line of thought she is proposing, as a bundle of femininity, so to speak, which arouses physical instincts and offers the hope of pleasure to be enjoyed, as for the intellectual content she is trying to communicate, it is lost on them.

This is why the woman should cover so the wrong eyes do not fall on her.

¹ The Satr for a woman is to cover everything with loose garments except the face, hands and feet.

² Alamgiri. Bahar-e-Shariat. Vol: 17

“A woman should be concealed, for when she goes out the devil looks at her.”^{iv}

The Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said to ‘Ali ibn Abu Tablib (may Allah be pleased with him) “Ali, do not let a second look follow the first. The first is allowed to you but not the second.”^v

It has been narrated “On the day of Judgment, molten lead will be poured into the eyes of the man who looks at the charms of a woman lustfully.”^{vi}

Distraction

An article from a local newspaper^{vii} concerning people flirting with the opposite sex. Part of the article states; *“...The Company said that, during hot summer weather, insurance claims for minor shunts appeared to increase. AA Insurance director Neale Phillips added, “This could be because men are distracted by women wearing more revealing clothing, but it’s hardly something that drivers will admit to on their claim form.”*

Student abuse

‘Newsweek magazine’ brought out a report about abuse of female students in the American Universities. It contains the following paragraph, *“The psychological drain can be particularly severe in a University. ‘There needs to be a relationship of trust and even intimacy (confidence) between students and professors.’ Says attorney Catherine A, ‘Sexual harassment can destroy even the possibility of learning.’ Affairs between professors and students have long been the subject of campus jokes, but women aren’t laughing any more. Harvard, Yale and the University of California are among the institutions where formal charges have been filed. A law-suit alleging that a Yale political Science professor promised an ‘A’ grade in return for sexual intercourse is now pending in the Federal Appeals Court.”*

We see students of Universities, colleges and even school that are half dresses and then wonder why these things are happening.

Question?

If you had a precious diamond which was worth your life and you had a need to cherish it, would you put it on display for potential thieves to see? The fact of the matter is, that it would most certainly not be displayed. In fact, no-one would let anyone know about it either. In the same way the respect and dignity of women is very precious as that of a diamond, therefore, in order for the wrong eyes to fall on her she needs to be protected.

One of the things of the vision that it occupies, as you occupy something which is not yours with your sight, i.e. if you touch something there is a type of occupation; the same occurs with the eye, if someone looked at a woman his eyes are occupying her body and Allah (The Exalted) prohibits entering it’s private property. Hijab protects this private property of females.

The wisdom

The wisdom in this practise lies in the fact that the woman’s sexually attractive features are concealed from the view of men who might happen to look or harm her. So long as the sphere in which everyone is called upon to cooperate in building society and laying its cultural foundations, men will be able to see the woman as a partner with them in the various types of social and humanitarian service and endeavour.

In other words, the wisdom in the hijab lies not in the fact that it helps the woman to adhere to virtuous morals; rather, it lies in the fact that it helps the men who look at the woman to practise self-restraint and, rather than dealing with her as a mere bundle of erotic stimuli, to relate to her as a human being who, like them, has academic and social skills to contribute to society and civilisation.

The Pill

The introduction of the Pill, wasn’t about the freedom of women, it had more to do with the liberation of men, to sleep with as many women as he desired without having to face any consequences, whilst the women continued to suffer and become prone to numerous cancers, from the daily intake of artificial hormones, which has been proven by medical research.

Freedom?

The western marketing strategy targeted at women, if looked from a different viewing glass is indeed mocking at best and deceitful at worst. Indeed it is a strange sight to see a woman wearing a woolly hat and scarf around the neck, with a thick padded jacket to keep her warm during winter, but yet shivering from the

cold felt by her exposed legs – the greatest body surface area, only half covered by a skirt – surely begs a question on the freedom of enjoyment by the modern Western women. At the heart of London, in the City, office secretaries in some of the major co-operations can only wear skirts.

It's for her modesty

There is less chance a man will look at a woman who is fully covered than one who is partially covered. There is no chance a man will be aroused when he sees a woman fully covered. Take the example of two identical twin sisters both extremely attractive walking down the street. One is fully covered and the other is wearing a mini skirt or some tight clothing which reveals parts of the body and there is a hooligan waiting for a catch walking down the opposite side of the street. Who will he be aroused by? By the one who is fully covered or the one who is dressed inappropriately? It is obvious that he will be attracted to the one who he is aroused by – which to doubt would be the woman who is dressed inappropriately. The fact of the matter is that men are weak, as stated in the Qur'an, and if a man who can't control himself wants what he wants, he will waste no time and this is one of the reasons why the numbers of rapes are on the increase. Allah states, "...and man has been created weak."^{viii} This is to do with marriage as men and women can not survive without each other.

Islam wants to protect individuals as well as the society at large. If a woman was raped what would she be going through? She would feel anxious, scared to go out alone and even go near any man and left with evil memories for the rest of her life.

I will present some rape statistics below:

American rape statistics

- Somewhere in America, a woman is raped every 2 minutes, according to the U.S. Department of Justice.
- In 1995, 354,670 women were the victims of a rape or sexual assault.^{ix}
- Over the last two years, more than 787,000 women were the victim of a rape or sexual assault.^x
- The FBI estimates that 72 of every 100,000 females in the United States were raped last year.^{xi}

Distorted U.K Rape Statistics?

Melanie Phillips; Daily Mail comments:

According to [recent UK reports], no fewer than one in every 20 women aged between 16 and 59 in England and Wales has been raped, and one in ten has experienced some form of 'sexual victimisation'...^{xii}

I ask the question, when does a person steal something? When the person knows something is there and catches the eye and the thief then desires it. Similarly, when does a person attack a woman and rape her? Simple, when his desires are aroused when he sees a woman that is dressed with parts of the body revealed.

Unfair...

All the above points are true, however, the question remains that why do the men not have to cover themselves?

As mentioned that it is a scientific fact that men are more easily affected by visual stimuli, which is why the extent of women's covering (Awrah) is greater than men's, but the fact remains that men are also supposed to behave and dress modestly. However, the Qur'an states:

"Order the Muslim men to lower down their sights a little and to guard their private parts. This is cleaner for them, undoubtedly, Allah is Aware of their deeds."^{xiii}

'Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) as wife of the Prophet, was observing the most stringent forms of Hijab, made specifically and particularly obligatory for the wives of the Prophet, cannot be doubted. Yet, her major and continual involvement in public affairs was such that it is impossible to suppose that she was rigidly segregated from public life or that it was impermissible or impossible for her to converse with leading figures as well as ordinary Muslim citizens. Nor is it possible to interpret Hijab as an absolute wall or barrier between men and women in Islam. Hijab cannot be interpreted to mean the total banishment of women from the social sphere in the Muslim society. In practise, the Hijab of 'Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her)

the favoured and most cherished wife of the Prophet, and one of the most loved and respected Mothers of the Faithful, did not prevent her from playing the roles of professor, jurist, lawyer-cum-judge, leader of a political party and even a military commander.

If people think that it is still unfair than the only other way I can explain is for you to answer a question: Can you give me statistics from anywhere or even your own knowledge of any woman who has raped or assaulted a man? I would think the answer is no, hence, the reason for the men not ordered by Allah (The Exalted) to cover themselves because even if the women was aroused she would not rape that man.

The laws laid by Islam are for the benefit of all, may He give us the understanding and ability to accept His Laws. Ameen.

ⁱ Bahar-e-Shariah

ⁱⁱ Radul Mohtar. Bahar-e-Shariat. Vol: 17

ⁱⁱⁱ A question was asked regarding the veiling of the Prophet Yusuf to which Muhadith-e-Kabir (The great Hadith Master) Shaykh Zia-ul-Mustafa (Shaykh-ul-Hadith) of India, gave this reply.

^{iv} Tirmidhi. Reported by Ibn Masud (may Allah be pleased with him)

^v Ahmad, Abu Daw'ud & Tirmidhi.

^{vi} Takmilah, Fath al-Qadir

^{vii} Asain Image, July 2004

^{viii} Surah Nisa, Surah No: 4, Verse: 28

^{ix} National Crime Victimization Survey. Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice, 1996.

^x Ibid

^{xi} Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Statistics, 1996.

^{xii} Crime and punishment, May 2003. <http://tim.2wgroup.com/blog/archives/000178.html>

^{xiii} Surah Nur; Surah No: 24, Verse: 30-31