

The definition of the Muslim woman veil

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allaah, the Most Merciful, the Bestower of Mercy

The question:

Some who set up themselves as guiders of people in these days say: the veil is defined according to usages, and the aim is to realise veiling. Hereupon, the Jilbaab or the dress that covers the entire body is not the model of the obligatory veil in these days. What made it obligatory is rather the customs of the Sahaabah (Companions), and we are not obliged to follow their usages. Therefore, if a woman wears a skirt and a shirt or a dress, or other garments that cover her body, she will be considered wearing the required veil that Allaah enjoined on women. So to what extent is this statement true?

The answer:

All praise is due to Allaah, the Lord of the Worlds. Peace and blessing be upon whom Allaah sent as a mercy to the Worlds, upon his Family, his Companions and his Brothers till the Day of Resurrection.

The person who has written this statement, when establishing the meaning of veil, has meant veiling in general and has linked it with the usage of Sahaabah رضي الله عنهم. This constitutive perspective cannot serve as an argument because of two reasons:

The first reason: is that the definition by the Sharee'ah of the fact of veiling (the woman's body), which is expected from the obligation to wear veil, is the veiling which is restricted to a set of conditions inherent to it, and which are derived from texts of the Book and the Sunnah, in a manner that makes the garment of the woman have the required description by the Sharee'ah.

Among the conditions that should be respected and which are set by the Sharee'ah are what follows:

- **The garment should cover all that is `Aura**¹ of her body, she should screen it from strangers (not her Mahaarim²), that is why it is called veiling, because it veils the woman who wears it from strangers³. As for her Mahaarim, the woman should not reveal but the places where adornments are worn. A comprehensive garment includes:

¹ The part of the body which is illegal to expose to others.

² Mahram (plural: Mahaarim): A male, whom a woman can never marry because of close relationship (e.g. a brother, a father, an uncle etc.); or her own husband.

³ See: "At-Ta`reefaat Al-Fiqhiyya" by Al-Burkuti (p.76).

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- the veil by which she covers her head, neck, ears and bosom by pulling it down and drawing it over them, in accordance with Allaah's تعالى saying:

وَأَلْيَضُرْبِنَ بِخُمْرِهِنَّ عَلَىٰ جُيُوبِهِنَّ

[...and to draw their veils all over Juyubihinna (i.e. their bodies, faces, necks and bosoms, etc.)]⁴

- The Jilbaab, Ridaa', or Milhafa which is also called Al-Mulaa'a, by which the woman covers herself and which she wears over her Khimaar and Dir` (an outer garment which covers her body from the neck to the feet) or Qamees (a garment worn under the outer veil), the woman covers then all the parts of her body which are `Aura: from her head to her feet. This is supported by Allaah's عزَّ وجلَّ saying:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لَأَرْوَاكِ وَبَنَاتِكَ وَنِسَاءِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ يُدْنِينَ عَلَيْهِنَّ مِنْ جَلَابِيبِهِنَّ ذَلِكَ أَدْنَىٰ أَنْ يُعْرَفْنَ فَلَا يُؤْذَيْنَ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا

[O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks (veils) all over their bodies. That will be better, that they should be known (as free respectable women) so as not to be annoyed. And Allaah is Ever Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful]⁵

Hereupon, the woman should take into account two cases as regards the length of her garment: a recommendable length, in which the garment exceeds the ankle by a span, and a (maximum) permissible length, in which the garment exceeds the ankle by a cubit⁶. This is supported by the hadeeth of Umm Salamah who said to the Prophet صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ when he mentioned Al-Izaar (a lower garment): "And the woman, Apostle of Allaah? He replied: She may hang down a span. Umm Salamah said: Still it (foot) will be uncovered. He said: Then a forearm's length, nor exceeding it"⁷.

- **The garment should be loose-fitting** and should not follow the contours of the body closely, as the loose-fitting garment does not correspond to the veil required by the Sharee'ah, since it marks the details of the body and makes it visible. In fact, the prohibition from wearing a close-fitting garment is expressed in the hadeeth reported by Ussaama Ibn Zayd رضي الله عنه who said: "The Messenger of Allaah صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ gave me a thick Egyptian garment that was one of the gifts given to him by Dihyat Al-Kalbi, and I gave it to my wife to wear it. He said, 'Why do I not see you wearing that Egyptian garment?' I said, 'I gave it to my wife to wear it'. He said, 'Tell her to wear a Ghilaala⁸ underneath it, for I am afraid that it may define the size of her bones"⁹. Moreover, it is known that even if the garment is opaque, its

⁴ Soorah an-Noor [31:24]

⁵ Soorah al-Ahzaab [33:59]

⁶ See: "Fath Al-Baaree" by Ibn Hajar (10/259).

⁷ Reported by Aboo Daawood, chapter of "Garment", concerning the train's length (hadeeth 4117), An-Nasaa'ee, chapter of "ornament", concerning the women's trains (hadeeth 5339), Ibn Maajah, chapter of "Garment", concerning the length of the women's trains (hadeeth 3580) and Ahmad in his "Musnad" (6/293) by the authority of Umm Salamah رضي الله عنها. This hadeeth is judged authentic by Al-Albaanee in "As-Silsilah As-Saheehah" (1/227).

⁸ Ghilaala: a garment worn underneath, and under the Dir` (a garment from the neck to the feet) [See: "Mukhtaar As-Sihaah" by Ar-Raazi (p. 479)].

⁹ Reported by Ahmad in his "Musnad" (5/205) and Al-Baihaqee in "As-Sunan Al-Kubra" (2/234) by the authority of Ussaama Ibn Zayd رضي الله عنه, Al-Haythamee said in "Majma` Az-Zawaa'id" (5/240): "The chain of narration of this

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opacity cannot prevent from describing the contour of the body or its organs as long as it is close-fitting.

- **The garment should be thick and should not be sheer**, lest it show the woman's skin colour. In fact, the interdiction of this is expressed in a Marfoo`¹⁰ hadeeth reported by Aboo Hurayrah رضي الله عنه: "Two are the types amongst the denizens of hell I have not seen yet, the one possessing whips like the tail of an ox and they flog people with their help. The (second one) the women who would be naked in spite of their being dressed, who are seduced (to wrong paths) and seduce others with their hair high like humps. These woman would not get into Paradise and they would not perceive the odour of it"¹¹.

In this hadeeth, there is a clear proof that wearing a thin and see-through garment that makes noticeable the woman's skin colour is forbidden. Ibn `Abd Al-Bar رحمه الله said: "What the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم meant was women who wear clothes made of light fabric which makes (the body) visible and does not cover (it). They are clothed in name but naked in reality."¹². Ibn Taymeeyah رحمه الله said: "The meaning of the phrase "clothed yet naked" is that the woman is wearing clothes that do not cover her, so she is clothed, but in fact she is naked, such as when she wears a thin dress that shows the colour of her skin, or a dress that shows the outline of her body, like her posterior, forearm or other parts. However, the clothes of a woman should cover well her body and should not show her body or the outline of her organs, as it should be thick and loose"¹³.

- **The garment of the woman should not be a garment of fame**, whether it is highly valued or not; in accordance with the Messenger's صلى الله عليه وسلم saying: "Whoever wears a garment of fame and vanity, Allaah will clothe him in a similar garment on the Day of Resurrection, then it will burst into flames"¹⁴. Ibn Taymeeyah رحمه الله said: "The garment of fame is detestable, whether it is high-priced and extraordinary or low-priced and extraordinary, as the Salaf (The Predecessors) used to hate these two garments of fame, the highly precious and the worthless. The Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم said in a hadeeth: "Whoever wears a garment of fame

hadeeth includes `Abdullaah Ibn Muhammad Ibn `Aqeel. In fact, the hadeeths that he reports are Hassan (good), but he has a certain weakness; otherwise, the other men of the chain of narration of this hadeeth are trustworthy ". Al-Albaanee judged it Hassan (good) in "Jilbaab Al-Mar'a Al-Muslimah" (p.131).

¹⁰ Marfoo` hadeeth: Whatever word, deed, approval, or attribute traced directly back to the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم with a connected or disconnected chain of transmission.

¹¹ Reported by Muslim (2/1021), chapter of "Garment and ornament" (hadeeth 2128) and Ahmad in his "Musnad" (2/355) on the authority of Aboo Hurayrah رضي الله عنه.

¹² See: "At-Tamheed" by Ibn `Abd Al-Bar (13/204).

¹³ See: "Majmoo` Al-Fataawa" by Ibn Taymeeyah (22/146).

¹⁴ Reported by Aboo Daawood, chapter of "Garment", concerning wearing a garment of fame (hadeeth 4029) on the authority of Ibn `Umar رضي الله عنهما. This hadeeth is judged Hassan (good) by Al-Albaanee in "Saheeh Al-Jaami'" (hadeeth 6526).

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and vanity; Allaah will clothe him in a garment of humiliation"¹⁵, and the best of things is the middle of them"¹⁶.

In this context also, the woman's dress should not be adorned, for fear of attracting and drawing people's attention, whether in its form, the light or brilliant colours on it, the material of which is made or the drawings and embroideries it contains; this is to get dressed in such a way so as not to show adornment. Al-Aloossi رحمه الله said, "Then know that among what I consider a forbidden adornment, which should be hidden, what many opulent women put today on their garments, with which they cover themselves when they go out. This garment is made of silk and is multicoloured. It is made of gold or silver drawings that catch eyes. In my opinion, the fact that the husbands and others allow them coming out in this state and walking among non-related people is a lack of jealousy. In fact, this phenomenon is wide-spread"¹⁷.

- **The dress should not resemble that of the man**, because "The Prophet صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ cursed effeminate men (who assume the manners of women) and those women who assume the manners of men"¹⁸. Also "**The Prophet صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ cursed the man who puts the woman's dress, and the woman who puts the man's dress**"¹⁹. In addition, "**The Prophet صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ cursed the woman who seeks to look like the man**"²⁰.

What is meant by the prohibition from the men's resembling women and vice versa is the imitation in the way of dressing, adornment and manner of speaking and walking; all these are, unanimously, forbidden for the one who does them intentionally and without being in state of constraint.

Ibn Hajar رحمه الله said "The women's and men's resembling to each other intentionally, and without being in constraint is unanimously forbidden"²¹.

- **The dress should not resemble the clothes of the disbelievers** or be part of their habits, because the Prophet صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ said "**He who imitates a people becomes one of them**"²².

¹⁵ Reported by Aboo Daawood (hadeeth 4030), Ibn Maajah, chapter of "Garment", concerning the one who wears a garment of celebrity (hadeeth 3606) and Ahmad in his "Musnad" (2/92). This hadeeth is judged Hassan (good) by As-Sakhaawi in "Al-Maqaassid Al-Hassana" (427) and Al-Albaanee in "Jilbaab Al-Mar'a Al-Muslimah" (p.213).

¹⁶ See: "Majmoo` Al-Fataawa" by Ibn Taymeeyah (22/138).

¹⁷ See "Rooh Al-Ma`aani" by Al-Aloossi (18/146).

¹⁸ Reported by Al-Bukhaaree, chapter of "Dress", concerning the men seeking to resemble women and the women seeking to resemble men (3/194) on the authority of Ibn `Abbaas رضي الله عنهما.

¹⁹ Reported by Aboo Daawood, chapter of "Dress", concerning the women's dress (hadeeth 4098) and Ahmad (2/325) on the authority of Aboo Hurayrah رضي الله عنه. This hadeeth is judged authentic by Al-Albaanee in "Saheeh Al-Jaami" (hadeeth 5095).

²⁰ Reported by Aboo Daawood, chapter of "Dress", concerning the women's dress (hadeeth 4099) on the authority of `A'ishah رضي الله عنها. This hadeeth is judged authentic by Al-Albaanee in "Saheeh Al-Jaami" (hadeeth 5096).

²¹ See "Fath Al-Baaree" by Ibn Hajar (9/336).

²² Reported by Aboo Daawood, chapter of "Dress", concerning the celebrity dress (hadeeth 4033) and Ahmad in his "Musnad" (2/50) on the authority of Ibn `Umar رضي الله عنهما. This hadeeth is judged authentic by Al-Iraqi in "Takhreej Al-Ihya" (1/359), and judged Hassan (good) by Ibn Hajar in "Fath Al-Baaree" (10/288) and judged Hassan (good) by Al-Albaanee in "Al-Irwaa'" (5/109).

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However, it is notorious that the required conditions of the woman's dress and its criteria are drawn from authentic religious texts that reveal the reality of the veil required by the Sharee'ah. Thus, giving a general definition to the veil without taking into consideration these conditions is a clear and grave error.

The second reason: the fact that the author of these words linked the definition of the veil to the Companion's custom needs some clarification:

If he meant that this dress – which constitutes one the Companions' garments and clothes to which they were used to – does not rely on evidence taken from the Sharee'ah to confirm or invalidate it, like the definition of usage in language, this saying would be undoubtedly vain. In addition, this would be refuted by the aforementioned evidences, scholarly consensus and the Companions practice. In fact, Umm Salamah رضي الله عنها said "When this verse was revealed:

يُدْنِينَ عَلَيْهِنَّ مِنْ جَلَابِيهِنَّ
[to draw their cloaks (veils) all over their bodies]²³,

the women of Ansaar²⁴ came out wearing covers, black like crows"²⁵.

`A'ishah رضي الله عنها also said, "May Allaah be merciful with the first Immigrant women, when Allaah revealed this verse:

وَأَلْيَضِرْبَنَ بِخُمْرِهِنَّ عَلَى جُيُوبِهِنَّ
[...and to draw their veils all over Juyoobihinna (i.e. their bodies, faces, necks and bosoms)]²⁶,

they tore their Muroot (kind of dresses) and made a hijab of it, then wore it"²⁷.

This and other texts prove that they were used to some customs and – by way of responding to the call of the Sharee'ah – turned to religious habits.

And if he meant that the definition of the veil is imposed by the usage of the Companions رضي الله عنهم based on religious habits approved by the authentic proves of the Sharee'ah, this would be true; but one should conform to the description and conditions of these proves.

²³ Soorah al-Ahzaab [33:59]

²⁴ The Companions of the Prophet صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ from the inhabitants of Al-Madeenah, who embraced Islaam and supported it and who received and entertained the Muslim emigrants from Makkah and other places.

²⁵ Reported by Aboo Daawood, chapter of "Dress", concerning Allaah's Word: [يُدْنِينَ عَلَيْهِنَّ مِنْ جَلَابِيهِنَّ] [to draw their cloaks (veils) all over their bodies] (hadeeth 4101) on the authority of Umm Salamah رضي الله عنها. This hadeeth is judged authentic by Al-Albaanee in "Ghaayat Al-Maraam" (hadeeth 282).

²⁶ Soorah an-Noor [24:31]

²⁷ Reported by Al-Bukhaaree, chapter of "Exegesis", concerning Allaah's Word: [وَأَلْيَضِرْبَنَ بِخُمْرِهِنَّ عَلَى جُيُوبِهِنَّ] [...and to draw their veils all over Juyoobihinna (i.e. their bodies, faces, necks and bosoms)] (2/561) on the authority of `A'ishah رضي الله عنها.

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The perfect knowledge belongs to Allaah عَزَّ وَجَلَّ. Our last prayer is all praise is due to Allaah, the Lord of the Worlds. Peace and blessing be upon our Prophet صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ, his Family, his Companions and Brothers till the Day of Resurrection.

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