



What is really behind the veil? A tantalizing look . . .

by S. Abul a'la Maududi
edited by Syed Mumtaz Ali

The purpose of reproducing this article is mainly to describe what is commonly known as the veil, hijab or purdah. Obviously the very first question which arise in this context, relates to the rights and obligations of women. As Dr. M. Hamidullah puts it, when studying the principal rights and obligations of women in Islam, it should first be pointed out that in spite of the capacity of Muslim law to adapt itself and develop according to circumstances, there will be no question that one will recognize the extreme liberty that women enjoy today both in practice and in fact. "She enjoys this liberty in certain segments of social life, both in the capitalistic and the communistic West. Islam demands that women should remain reasonable beings. It does not expect women to become either angels nor demons. 'The golden means is the best of things,' said Prophet Muhammad. If one wants to compare or contrast her position in Islam with that in other civilizations or legal systems, then one should take into consideration all the facts, and not merely isolated practices. In fact, with regards to certain aspects of morality, Islam is more rigid and more puritan than certain other systems of life in our times."

In this context, if the question were, 'how much freedom are women allowed in Islam?' the answer is simple. There is little difference of opinion, and there is not any question about the origin of the veil injunctions and their Divine origin. The most one might differ in this regard is whether or not the hands and the face are to be covered or not. This is the only difference and it is not a major one at all.

What follows here is an edited excerpt from Purdah and the Status of Woman in Islam, (Ch. 12 - The Social System of Islam) by S. Abul a'la Maududi Published by Islamic Publications Ltd., Lahore, Pakistan 13-E, Shahalam Market, Lahore. (Pakistan) © 1987 . The learned author has described the object of this book as twofold. First he tackled the entire social system of Islam. He described the social system of Islam to both Muslims and non-Muslims and then he explained the necessity and importance for the purdah injunctions contained within the Qur'an and Hadith. Secondly he cited the relevant injunctions in the Qur'an and Hadith to so-called modern Muslims in order to compare and contrast them with the precepts that are fundamental to the Western way of life along with the pathetic consequences of acting upon them as against the doctrines and results of the Western way of life. We invite our readers to refer to S. Maududi's book for a more thorough study. - Editor

What follows here below is an outline of the social system of Islam as presented in the preceding chapter of the book.

Before we proceed further, let us examine the main features of this system: -

Safeguards

1. The main object of this system is to keep the social environment as clean as possible of all sorts of sexual excitement and stimulation. This enables man to develop his physical and mental abilities in a pure and peaceful atmosphere so that he may play his role effectively in the building of civilization with conserved energy.

2. Sexual relations should be restricted to marriage only. Not only should sexual lawlessness outside of marriage be curbed, but as far as possible undesirable sexual feelings should also be controlled.

3. The woman's sphere of activity should be separate from that of man's. They should be entrusted with separate social responsibilities according to their respective natures, and mental and physical abilities. Also their mutual

relationships should be organized in such a way that they co-operate with each other within the lawful limits and will not transgress these limits so that they interfere with the duties of the opposite sex.

4. Men should have the position of *qawwam* [lit. a position similar to a general manager, director general, custodian, caretaker, or guardian] in the family and the rest of the members in the family should obey [or follow, to be under the authority of, or command, heed, observe, bear in mind] him. [Men must always bear in mind that they are required to be kind and considerate and not abuse this privilege through tyranny of those put under his charge.]

5. Both men and women should be assigned all their human rights, and both should be furnished with all possible opportunities for advancement. Neither should be allowed to transgress the limits which have been prescribed for their respective gender-related positions in society.

The social system which has been built on these footings needs to be strengthened by a few safeguards as well so that it is able to function with all its potentialities. Islam has provided three kinds of such safeguards:

1. Self-purification,
2. Punitive Laws, and
3. Preventive Measures

These safeguards have been provided in accordance with the true spirit and objectives of the social system, and they all help it function effectively.

I. Through the process of self-purification, man is so educated and trained that he automatically begins following and obeying the system, whether there is or is not an external force which compels him to obey.

II. Punitive laws prevent the commission of all such crimes that may disintegrate the system or destroy any of its footings.

III. Preventive measures help organize the social life in such a manner that it is automatically safeguarded from all sorts of unnatural excitement and artificial stimulation, and thus the possibility of sexual anarchy is reduced to a minimum. Those people who are not reformed spiritually and are not afraid of the penal law can be thwarted only by these preventive measures. These preventive measures raise such barriers that despite their inclination toward sexual lawlessness, it becomes particularly difficult for them to commit the act. Moreover, those measures which essentially segregate the male and female spheres of activity will constrain the family system to function in a truly Islamic pattern, and this will further safeguard those boundaries which have been prescribed by Islam that preserve the distinction between the lives of men and women.

Self-purification

I. A sound faith in Islam is a basic factor which requires its followers to obey the laws of this system. A person who believes in Allah, His Book and His Prophet is the one for the whose compliance the *Shari'ah* enjoins in its injunctions. For the sake of one's personal guidance, it is enough for one to know that a certain command is the command of Allah and that a certain prohibition is the prohibition by Him. Therefore, when a believer comes to know from the Book of Allah [the Qur'an] that He forbids indulgence in obscenity and sexual promiscuity, his faith demands that he should not only abstain from indulging in it practically but should also keep his heart clean from all inclinations towards it. Similarly, when a Muslim woman comes to know that Allah and His Prophet have given her a particular position in the social system, she is required by her faith to accept that position willingly and to remain satisfied with it. Just like in the other spheres of life, a correct and complete obedience to the Islamic injunctions depends on one's faith in Islam, so it is that in the moral and social spheres as well. That is why mankind has been first invited to believe in Islam and have a sound faith in it. He is then given moral and social instructions for his guidance in life.

This scheme for spiritual reform underlies not only the moral theory but the whole system of Islam. In the moral sphere, Islam has adopted a highly practicable and sound process for educating its followers, and we will now briefly describe it.

Haya

As pointed out above, adultery, theft, lying, and all other sins which man commits under the impulse of his animal qualities, run counter to his human nature. All such acts have been described in the Qur'an with the comprehensive word '*munkar*,' which literally means 'unknown or little-known.' These acts have been called *munkar* because they are unknown and repugnant to human nature. Obviously then, when an act runs counter to human nature and man commits it nonetheless under animal impulses, there must be something in human nature itself which will prevent him from approaching these sins in the first place. The Divine Law-Giver has specified this thing as *Haya*.

Literally, *Haya* means shyness [modesty, sense of decency]. As an Islamic term, *Haya* implies that kind of shyness which a wrongdoer feels before his own nature and before his God. That shyness is the force which prevents man from indulging in indecency and obscenity. If, in spite of this he commits a sin under the impulse of his animal nature, this same shyness will make him feel the pangs of conscience. The moral teachings of Islam aim not only at awakening this dormant feeling of shyness in human nature but also to try to develop it as a part of man's mental makeup so that it may serve as a strong moral deterrent

against evil inclinations. This is exactly the explanation of the *Hadith* which says, "Every religion has a morality, and the morality of Islam is *Haya*." [And indeed, this in effect the sum and substance of the Islamic system of morality!]

Another *Hadith* touches on the same subject. The Holy Prophet said: "**When you do not have *Haya*, you may do whatever you please.**" When a person does not have the deterrent of *Haya* in him, the desires that spring from his animal instincts will seize him and he will not hesitate to indulge in sin. The feeling of *Haya* is inherent in man although it is in a crude form. It abhors all sins by nature, but it lacks knowledge. Therefore it does not know exactly why it abhors a particular sin. But this lack of knowledge gradually weakens its feeling of abhorrence with the result that man will begin to commit sins under the impulse of his animality, and the repeated commission of those sins will finally destroy his sense of modesty altogether. The moral teachings of Islam aim to educate *Haya*. It not only acquaints it with the manifest sins, but also lays bare before it all the evils of desire and intention that are hidden in the innermost heart of man. Thus, it warns it of all the possible mischiefs of the evil spirit, so that it may abhor them consciously and with conviction. Moral training, then, further sharpens the sensitivity of this "educated" *Haya* with the result that it is thus enabled to detect even the slightest inclination towards evil and sin. So much so that it detects even the most secret lapse in one's intention and desire.

The range of *Haya* in Islamic morality is so vast that it encompasses every aspect in human life. Thus, the aspect of man's social life which is related to sex has also been reformed in Islam by means of *Haya*. Islam detects even the slightest lapse of the human self in sexual affairs and warns *Haya* of their presence and exhorts it to be vigilant. It is not possible here to go into further detail, but a few illustrations are necessary: -

(1) Hidden motives

In the eyes of the law, adultery implies a physical union only, but from a moral point of view, every evil inclination towards a member of the opposite sex outside of marriage amounts to adultery. Thus, to enjoy the beauty of another woman with one's eyes, to relish the sweetness of her voice with one's ears, to draw pleasure of the tongue by conversing with her, and turning of the feet over and over again to visit her street . . . are all preliminaries to adultery, nay adultery itself. The Law cannot have jurisdiction over such acts, for it springs from the hidden motives of man. It can only be detected by his own conscience. The Holy Prophet has elucidated this point as follows: "**Eyes commit adultery, and their adultery is the evil look; hands commit adultery, and their adultery is the use of violence; feet commit adultery, and their adultery is moving towards sin; the adultery of the tongue is (lustful) talk; and the adultery of the heart is the evil desire. In the end, the sexual organs either confirm all**

this (by their action) or disapprove of it."

(2) Evil looks

The evil look is the worst culprit in this regard. Both the Qur'an and *Hadith* have pointed it out first of all. The Qur'an says,

"(O Prophet) tell the believing men to restrain their eyes (from looking at other women) and guard their shameful parts; this is a pure way for them; surely, Allah knows full well what they do. And (O Prophet) tell the believing women to restrain their eyes (from looking at other men) and guard their shameful parts." (24:30-31)

The Holy Prophet says, "**Son of Adam, your first (unintentional) look is pardonable. But beware that you do not cast a second look.**" (Al-Jassas)

He said to Hazrat Ali, "**O Ali, do not cast a second look after the first one. The first look is pardonable, but not the second.**" (Abu Da'ud)

Hazrat Jabir asked the Prophet what should he do if he happened to cast a look by chance. The Prophet instructed him that he should turn his eyes away forthwith. (Abu Da'ud).

(3) Urge for Display

The feminine urge to display her beauty is another evil which is associated with the evil look. This urge is not always prominent as it is generally hidden in the depths of the heart. It often finds expression in the selection of pleasing, gauzy and bright clothes, fancy hairdos as well as innumerable and seemingly insignificant aspects in female behaviour. The Qur'an has comprehensively termed them all as *Tabarruj-i-Jahiliyyah*. All beautification and make-up which is meant to please and entertain anyone other than the husband is *Tabarruj-i-Jahiliyyah*. Even if a pretty and bright coloured veil is worn in order to appear attractive and pleasing to the eyes, it is still *Tabarruj-i-Jahiliyyah*. No law can be made to check and control this tendency because it springs from the woman's own heart. Only she can search her heart to detect any hidden evil desires. If it is there it must be eradicated according to the following Divine commandment:

". . . And do not go about displaying your fineries as women used to do in the days of ignorance . . ." (33:33)

A decoration is Islamic when it is free from an evil motive. But as soon as it is corrupted by an evil motive, it becomes un-Islamic.

(4) Voice

The voice is another agent of the evil spirit. There is countless mischief which is provoked and spread by the voice. A man and a woman may be seemingly engaged in innocent talk, but hidden motives of the heart are at work. It renders the voice more and more sweet, the accent and words more and more appealing. The Qur'an detects this hidden motive:

" . . . if you are God-fearing, do not talk in the soft voice, lest the man of unhealthy heart should cherish false hopes from you. If you have to speak (to other men), speak in an unaffected way (as people ordinarily do)." (33:32)

This is the same evil desire which finds pleasure and satisfaction in relating or listening to stories about other people's lawful and unlawful sexual relations. To satisfy this same urge, lyrical poetry is written and imaginary love stories are described which will snatch people's fancy and spread throughout society like wildfire. The Qur'an admonishes man about this as well.

"Those people who desire to spread indecency and obscenity among the Believers have a grievous torment in store for them in this world and the Hereafter." (24:19)

The mischief caused by the voice has many other characteristics and in each aspect there is one or another evil motive that is at work. Islam has detected all these motives and has warned man to be wary of them. For instance, a woman is not allowed to describe the features of another woman to her husband: **"A woman should not have too close an intimacy with another woman, lest she should describe her before her husband in a manner as if he himself saw her."** (Al-Tirmizi)

Both men and women have been forbidden to describe their secret sexual affairs to other people, because this also causes indecency to spread by creating evil desires in their hearts. (Abu Da'ud).

If the *Imam* commits a mistake in the congregational prayer, or he is to be warned of some lapse, the males have been taught to say *Subhan Allah* (Allah be glorified), whereas the females have been instructed to only clap their hands. (Abu Da'ud).

(5) Sound

Sometimes attention is attracted not only by the word-of-mouth, but by some other device. Such intrigues also spring from evil motives and Islam disapproves of them all:

" . . . and they should not stamp the ground in walking, so is to reveal their hidden decoration (ornaments, etc., by their jingle)." (24:31)

(6) Perfume

Perfume also acts as an intermediary between two evil spirits. This is a refined and most subtle means of communication. It may appear to be trivial in the eyes of others, but the Islamic *Haya* is too sensitive to let it go undetected. It will not allow a Muslim woman to wear scented clothes and then pass on the ways or sit in gatherings. For even if her beauty and makeup are hidden, her perfume will waft through the air inciting emotional stimulation. The Holy Prophet said,

1. **"The woman who uses perfume and passes through the people is promiscuous."** (Al-Tirmizi).

2. **"When a woman from among you wants to go to the mosque, she should not use perfume."** (Mu'atta and Muslim)

3. **"Males should use that perfume which does not give colour but has a strong smell, and females should use that perfume which gives colour but has a light smell."** (Abu Da'ud).

(7) Nudity

Islam has given such a correct and psychological interpretation of the sense of modesty, with respect to covering the shameful parts of body, that there is no parallel in any other civilization. For instance, men and women in most civilized nations of the world today do not feel any hesitation to display any part of their bodies. For them, clothing is a means of decoration and not for covering one's nakedness. But from the Islamic viewpoint, covering the shameful parts is more important than mere decoration. Islam enjoins its followers, both male and female, to cover all those parts of their bodies which may attract the opposite sex. That is why nudity is an indecency which is not tolerated by the Islamic *Haya*. Islam does not even approve of a husband and wife exposing their shameful parts to each other. The Holy Prophet says:

1. **"When one of you goes to his wife, he should mind his shameful parts. They should not both strip their clothes off their bodies and become naked like donkeys."** (Ibn Majah).

2. Hazrat A'isha says that she never saw the Holy Prophet naked. (Al-Tirmizi)

The Holy Prophet says: **"Mind that you never become naked, for you are being attended by the angels of God who never leave you alone, except at the time when you have to attend to the call of nature or when you go to your wives. Therefore you should feel shame and have modesty before them and have regard for them** [be conscious of their invisible presence]." (Al-Tirmizi)

According to Islam. The dress which shows the body

and reveals the shameful parts is no dress at all. The Holy Prophet said, "**Those women who remain naked even after wearing clothes, allure others and are allured by others, and walk coquettishly with the head turned to one side, will never enter Paradise, nor even get its scent.**" (Muslim)

It is not possible to treat this subject in the an exhaustive manner here. However, a few instances that we have presented above are meant to give an idea of the standard and spirit of Islamic morality. It must have become clear by now that Islam aims to cleanse society of all kinds of excitement that leads to indecency and obscenity. All these feelings arise from man's inner-self which is the breeding ground for the germs of indecency and obscenity and wherefrom motives spring which, although apparently trivial on the surface, lead to great inequities in the long run. Ignorant people will regard them lightly, and therefore overlook them, but the wise know that they are indeed the real cause of all the moral and social afflictions that plague civilization and bring it to ruin. Therefore, the moral teachings of Islam strive to create a strong feeling of *Haya* in the inner self of man with a view to enable him to censor the doing of his carnal self and eradicate by his own will even the slightest inclination towards evil.

II. Punitive Laws

The basic principle in the punitive laws of Islam is that unless a person essentially commits a crime which leads to the disruption of the social system, he should not be proceeded against legally. But when he has indeed committed such a crime, it is not proper to compel him to become a habitual offender by awarding him light punishment. Therefore on the one hand, while Islamic Law requires extremely strict conditions in order to establish the crime so as to protect people from its application, on the other hand, when the crime is clearly established, it inflicts such a heavy punishment on the culprit that not only does it disable him from repeating the crime, but it deters thousands of others who might be inclined towards that same crime. Indeed the object of law is to cleanse the society of crimes and not to encourage the people instead to commit crimes and go on receiving punishments over and over again.

In order to protect the social system, the Penal Law of Islam holds only two offences as punishable: (a) Fornication, and (b) Calumny [Slander].

(1) Punishment for fornication

As pointed out above, fornication is morally the most hideous crime that a person can commit. The one who commits it in fact has proven that his humanity has been overwhelmed by his animality and that he is not fit to live as a virtuous member of human society. From a social point of view, it is one of those horrible crimes which cut at the

very root of human civilization. Therefore, Islam holds that fornication, per se, be treated as an offence which deserves punishment for its own sake, whether or not it is accompanied by some other offence such as the use of violence or encroachment upon somebody else's legal rights.

The Qur'an says:

"The fornicators shall each be given a hundred lashes, and let not compassion for them keep you from carrying out the sentence of the Divine Law, if you truly believe in Allah and the Last Day. And let a number of Muslims witness their chastisement." (24:2)

Islamic law differs radically from Western law in this matter. In some western countries, Western law does not hold fornication by itself to be a crime. It becomes a crime only when it has been committed forcibly or with a married woman. In other words, according to the Western laws prevailing in those countries fornication by itself is not a crime, but the real crime for them is rape, or the active encroachment on the rights of a husband. In contrast to this, Islamic Law sees fornication alone as a crime, and regards rape or the active encroachment as additional crimes. This basic difference between these two viewpoints gives rise to the difference in the punishment of the offence. In the case of rape, Western law is content with the sentence of imprisonment only [or other such light punishment], whereas in the case of fornication with a married woman, it requires that the fornicator pay compensation to the husband for alienation of affection, if he succeeds in a civil suit brought for that purpose. Such a light punishment does not in effect act as an effective deterrent, but instead it encourages this crime. That is why fornication is on the increase in those countries where this law is in force. In contrast to this, Islamic law punishes fornication and adultery so severely that society is automatically cleansed of this crime for a long long time. That is why it is not common in those countries where the Islamic punishment for it is administered. Once the *Shari'ah* punishment is carried out, it so terrifies the whole population that no one will dare commit it for years to come. In a way, it performs a psychological operation on the minds of those having criminal tendencies, and thus reforms them automatically.

Western people seem to abhor the punishment of a hundred lashes. This is not just because they dislike the idea of physical torture, but it is because their moral sense is not yet fully developed. At first they regard fornication as something indecent, but now they look upon it as an amusement, a pastime and something which engrosses two persons for a little while. Therefore, they want their laws to tolerate this act, and that it should not regard it seriously unless the fornicator encroaches upon somebody else's

freedom or legal rights. Even in the case of such an encroachment, they regard this as a crime which affects the rights of one person only. Hence, they think that a light sentence or payment of compensation as damages for a tort of alienation of affection is sufficient punishment for the crime.

Obviously, a person who holds such a view about fornication and non-marital consensual sexual relationships will look upon a hundred lashes as a cruel punishment. But if his moral and social sense were more developed, he would realize that fornication, whether committed willingly or forcefully, whether it was with a married woman or with a non-married one, whether consensual or non-consensual, is a social crime that affects the whole of society. Naturally this will cause him to modify his views about punishment, so that the society can be saved from the ill effects of fornication. He will have to admit that since the motives leading to fornication lie deep within the animal nature of man, and since it cannot be eradicated by mere imprisonment or inflicting penalties, strict measures must be adopted for their complete eradication. It is better to subject one or a couple of persons to severe physical torture, which in turn will safeguard hundreds of thousands of people against countless moral and social evils, than to inflict a light punishment on criminals and so jeopardize the well-being of not only society but also coming generations.

There is another reason for Westerners to regard the administration of a hundred lashes as cruel. As pointed out above, Western civilisation emerged as a result of the urge of favouring the individual against the society, and it has been built-up on an exaggerated notion of the rights of the individual. Therefore, even if the individual harms society to his heart's content, Western people would not feel ill at ease and they would tolerate it willingly in most cases. So when an individual is proceeded against with a view to protecting the rights of society, they shudder with horror and all their sympathies go to the individual who went against society. Additionally, like all ignorant people, Westerners also have that special characteristic of regarding human feelings as more important than reason. Therefore, when they see an individual being severely dealt with, they feel outraged at the sight of his suffering, but they do not seem to appreciate the far-reaching consequences of the damage that can be done to society and future generations, too.

(2) Punishment for calumny [slander]

The evil caused by calumny is similar to that caused by fornication itself. To accuse a lady of fornication will not only damage her reputation, but will also create poor relations between the families. It will render parentage doubtful and spoil the conjugal relations between the husband and the wife and will ruin the mental peace of scores of other people for years to come. Therefore the Qur'an has enjoined a severe punishment for this offence as well:

"As for those who accuse virtuous women (of fornication) and then do not bring four witnesses as a proof thereof, give them each eighty lashes, and do not accept their evidence in future: they themselves are the fornicators." (24:4)

III. Preventive measures

Thus, on the one hand, the punitive law of Islam curbs fornication and adultery by force, and on the other, it protects the righteous element of society against calumny. Whereas the moral teachings of Islam cleanse man from within so that he does not feel inclined toward sin, its punitive law regulates his external behaviour so that in the event that his moral training remained defective his evil inclinations which are taking shape may be suppressed by force. Besides this, certain other measures have also been adopted so as to reform the self. These measures have been employed in reforming the social system so that the weakness of the individual (on account of his defective moral training) will not develop into actuality. They aim to create a social environment which is unfavourable for the development of evil inclinations and emotional disturbances. Thus they help weaken factors which lead to sexual anarchy and eradicate all forms of indecency that might envelope the social system in confusion.

Now we shall consider these measures one by one and deal with them at length.

(1) Injunctions for clothing and covering up nakedness

In this regard, Islam has first of all eradicated nudity and specified what shameful parts males and females are to cover. With regard to dress, the conduct of the so-called civilized nations of today is not that much different from that of the Arabs of the pre-Islamic period. Those Arabs would freely strip themselves naked in front of each other. Even while having a bath or attending to the call of nature. They did not restrict themselves to bare their bodies no more than what was necessary for the purpose. They would move round the Kab'ah in a naked state, and even considered it to be an essential part of their worship. Moreover, the women would perform this ceremony in perfect nakedness. The dress they wore was such that it left a part of their breasts, arms, backs and shins uncovered. Similar to this are the conditions that are prevalent today in Europe, America and Japan with respect of dress. Also, in Eastern countries there is no other social system which has as elaborate a dress code as Islam has, clearly defining the limits as to which specific parts of the body may be bared, to what extent and in what conditions and circumstances. Islam alone has taught man the first lessons of civilization in this regard. The Qur'an says:

"O Children of Adam! We have sent down to you clothing in order to cover shameful parts of your

body, to serve as protection and decoration." (7:26)

According to this verse, then, covering the body has been made obligatory for every male and female. The Holy Prophet gave strict orders to the fact that no person should appear naked before any other person:

1. **"Accursed is the one who casts a look at the shameful parts of his brother."** (Ahkam-al-Qur'an by al-Jassas).
2. **"No man should look at a naked man and no woman should look at a naked woman."** (Muslim)
3. **"By God, it is better for me to be dropped from the skies and torn in two than that I should look at the shameful parts of somebody or that somebody should look at my shameful parts."** (Al-Mabsut).
4. **"Beware, never strip yourself of clothes, for with you is the One Who never leaves you alone, except at the time when you attend to the call of nature or have intercourse"** (Al-Tirmizi)
5. **"When one of you goes to his wife, he should cover his nakedness even at that time. He should not make himself naked like a donkey."** (Ibn Majah).

According to another Tradition, once the Holy Prophet went to a pasture meant for the camels of *Zakat*, and saw that the camel-herd was lying naked on the ground. The Holy Prophet ordered his removal forthwith, and said: **"We have no use for a person who is shameless."**

Boundaries of *Satar* for Males

Besides these general instructions, Islam has also specified those parts of the body which both males and females must cover. Such parts that are obligatory to cover are termed as *Satar* by the *Shari'ah*. For males, the *Satar* is that part of the body between the naval and the knee, and it has been enjoined that one should neither uncover this part in front of another person, nor should one look at this part of anybody else:

1. **"Whatever is above the knee should be covered, and whatever is below the naval should be covered."** (Darqutni)
2. **"The male should cover that part of the body which is between the naval and the knee."** (Al-Mabsut)
3. Hazrat 'Ali bin Abi Talib has reported that the Holy Prophet said: **"Do not uncover your thigh before another person, nor look at the thigh of a living or dead person."** (Tafsir-i-Kabir)
This is a general command which excludes none but the wives. The Holy Prophet said, **"Guard your *Satar* from all except your wives and your slave girls."** (Ahkam-al-Qur'an, Vol. III, p.7).

Boundaries of *Satar* for Females

The boundaries of *Satar* for females are wider. They have been enjoined to cover the whole body except their face and hands from all people, including father, brother and all male relatives, and excluding none but the husband.

The Holy Prophet said:

1. **"It is not lawful for any woman who believes in Allah and the Last Day that she should uncover her hand more than this"** - and then he placed his hand on his wrist joint. (Ibn Jarir)
2. **"When a woman attains maturity, no part of her body should remain uncovered except her face and her hands up to the wrist joints."** (Abu Da'ud)
3. Hazrat A'isha says that she appeared before her nephew, 'Abdullah bin al-Tufail, with decorations. The Holy Prophet did not approve of it. I said, "O Apostle of Allah, he is my nephew." The Holy Prophet replied: **"When a woman attains maturity, it is not lawful for her to uncover any part of her body except the face and this"** - and then he put his hand on his wrist joint so as to leave only a little space between the place he grabbed in the palm. (Ibn Majah)
4. Hazrat Asthma, daughter of Abu Bakr, who is the Holy Prophet's sister-in-law, came before him in thin dress that showed her body. The Holy Prophet turned his eyes away and said: **"O Asthma, when a woman attains maturity, it is not lawful that any part of her body can be seen except this and this"** - and then he pointed to his face and palms of his hands. (Takmilah, Fath-al-Qadir)
5. Hafsah, daughter of 'Abdur Rahman, came before Hazrat A'isha and she was wearing a thin wrapper over her head and shoulders. Hazrat A'isha tore it up to pieces and put a thick wrapper over her. (Mu'atta, Imam Malik).
6. The Holy Prophet said: **"Allah has cursed those women who wear clothes and still remained naked."**
7. Hazrat 'Umar says, **"Do not clothe your women in such clothes that are tight fitting and reveal all the outlines of the body."** (Al-Mabsut)

All these traditions show that except for the face and the hands, the whole female body is included in *Satar* which a woman must conceal in her house even from her nearest relatives. She cannot expose her *Satar* before anybody and this includes her father, brother or nephew. Also she cannot wear a dress that shows her *Satar*. Her husband is excluded.

All these commandments in this regard are meant for the young woman. They become applicable as soon as she attains maturity and remains in force until she loses all sexual appetite. At this stage, the severity of the commandments is also relaxed. The Qur'an says:

"There is no harm if the old woman who has no hope of marriage lay aside her over-garments, provided that they do not mean to display their decoration. But if they abstain from this, it is better for them . . ." (24:59)

Here the reason for relaxation has been clearly mentioned. ". . . *who have no hope of marriage*" implies the age at which sexual inclinations die out, and the sexual appetite also disappears. Nevertheless, the condition that "they do not mean to display their decoration" has been imposed as a safeguard. That is, if an old woman has a sexual desire hidden in her heart, it is not lawful for her to put away her over-garment.

(2) Regulations for entering houses

The next restriction imposed by Islam is that the male members are forbidden to enter the house without alerting the female members, so that they do not see them in a condition which they should not normally see them. The Qur'an enjoins:

"When your children attain puberty, they should ask leave before entering the house, just as their elders asked it before them. . ."

Here, the reason for the commandment has also been stated. The need to ask permission arises at the age of puberty when sexual feelings become active. Therefore, it is not necessary to ask permission before attaining this age. Besides this, other people have also been prohibited to enter someone else's house without permission:

"O Believers, do not enter houses other than your own, until you have taken permission; and when you enter a house, greet the people therein with salutation . . ." (24:27)

The object is to differentiate the house from the outside world, so that men and women may live in peace inside their own homes and are protected from the gaze of other people. At first the Arabs could not grasp the real significance of these commandments, therefore they would often peep into houses from outside. Once the Holy Prophet was present in his room, when a person peeped through the lattice. The Prophet said: **"If I had known that you were peeping, I would have thrust something into your eye. The command to ask permission has been given to safeguard people against the (evil) look."** (Al-Bukhari)

Then the Holy Prophet publicly announced: **"If a person peeps into somebody else's house without permission, the people of the house will be justified if they injure his eye."** (Muslim)

Then the people were taught that if they had to ask for something from somebody else's house, they should not straightway enter a house, but should ask for it from outside from behind a covering.

". . . and when you ask women for an article, ask for

it from behind a curtain; this is a pure way for your hearts and for theirs . . ." (33:53)

Here also the object of imposing the restriction has been stated in these words: ". . . *This is a purer way for your hearts and for theirs . . .*" The objective is to safeguard males and females from sexual inclinations and excitement by keeping them at a safe distance, so that they do not grow too intimate and free with each other.

These commandments are meant not only for the other people but also for the servants of the house. Once Hazrat Bilal or Hazrat Anas asked Hazrat Fatimah, daughter of the Holy Prophet, to hand him her child. She handed it stretching her hand from behind a curtain (Fath-al-Qadir), and both these gentlemen were the personal attendants of the Holy Prophet and lived with him like other people in the house.

(3) Prohibition of touching or having privacy with women

The third restriction is that a man, other than the husband, is neither allowed to be alone with a woman, nor is he allowed to touch any part of the body, no matter how closely he's related to her. According to 'Uqbah bin 'Amir, the Holy Prophet said:

1. **"Beware that you do not call on women in privacy." One of the Ansar asked, "O Apostle of Allah, what about the younger or the elder brother of the husband?"** The Holy Prophet said, **"He is death!"** (Al-Tirmizi, Al-Bukhari and Muslim)
2. **"Do not call on women in the absence of their husbands because Satan might be circulating in any one of you like blood."** (Al-Tirmizi)
3. **"According to 'Amr bin 'As, the Holy Prophet forbade men to call on women without permission of the husbands."** (Al-Tirmizi)
4. **"From this day, no man is allowed to call on a woman in the absence of her husband, unless he is accompanied by one or two other men."** (Muslim)

Likewise is the prohibition of touching the body of a woman:

1. The Holy Prophet said, **"The one who touches the hand of a woman without having a lawful relation to her, will have an ember placed on his palm on the Day of Judgment."** (Takmilah, Fath-al-Qadir)
2. Hazrat A'isha says the Holy Prophet accepted the oath of allegiance from women only verbally without taking their hand into his own hand. He never touched the hand of a woman who was not married to him. (Al-Bukhari)
3. Omaimah, daughter of Roqaiqah, says that she went to the Holy Prophet in company with some other women to take the oath of allegiance. He made them promise that

they would abstain from idolatry, stealing, adultery, slander, and disobedience to the Prophet. When they had taken the oath, they requested him to take their hand as a mark of allegiance. The Holy Prophet said, "**I do not take the hand of women. Verbal agreement is enough.**" (Nasa'i, Ibn Majah)

These commitments apply in respect of young women. It is lawful to sit with a woman of advanced age in privacy and touching them is also not prohibited. It has been reported that Hazrat Abu Bakr used to visit the clan where he had been suckled and shook hands with the old women. It has been reported about Hazrat 'Abdullah bin Zubair that he used to have his feet and head pressed gently for relief by an old woman. This distinction between the old and the young woman itself suggests that the real object is to prevent such mixing of the sexes together as may lead to evil results.

(4) Distinction between *mahram* and non-*mahram* males

These commitments apply to all men whether *mahram*, or non-*mahram*, other than the husband. The woman is not allowed to uncover her *Satar* in front of any of them, just as the man is not allowed to uncover his *Satar* before anyone. All males have to enter the house with permission and none of them is allowed to sit with a woman in privacy or touch her body. There is, however, a difference in the matter of touching the body of the woman between *mahram* and the non-*mahram* males. A brother, for instance, can give his sister a hand in getting on or off the conveyance. Obviously, a non-*mahram* male cannot be allowed to do that. When the Holy Prophet returned from a journey, he would embrace Hazrat Fatimah, his daughter, and would kiss her head. Similarly, Hazrat Abu Bakr used to kiss the head of his daughter, Hazrat A'isha.

Then Islam has made the distinction between the *mahram* and the non-*mahram* males. The Qur'an and *Hadith* clearly point out that the limits of freedom that can be achieved with the *mahram* males only, but not with the non-*mahram* males in any case. That is what has commonly been described as *Purdah* or *Hijab*.