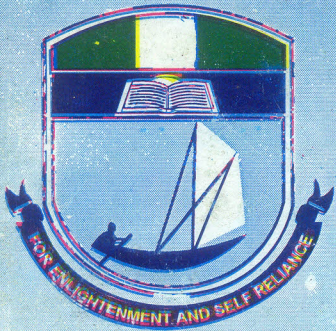


At 12/8/18

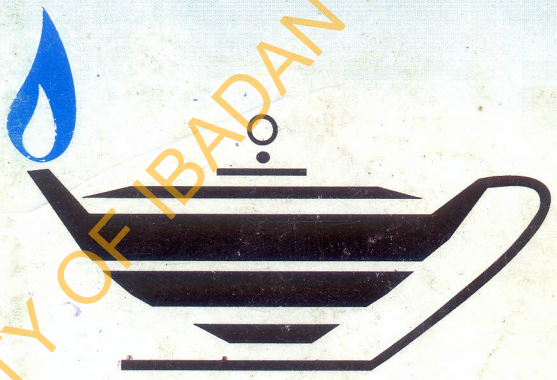


JOURNAL OF RELIGION

AND CULTURE

Department of Religious and Cultural Studies
Faculty of Humanities,
University of Port Harcourt.

Vol. 2 No. 2, 2001



UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN LIBRARY



JOURNAL OF RELIGION AND CULTURE
Volume 2 Number 2, 2001

A Publication of the Department of Religious and Cultural
Studies
Faculty of Humanities
University of Port Harcourt.

Department of Religious and Cultural Studies
Faculty of Humanities
University of Port Harcourt
P.M.B 5323, Port Harcourt
Rivers State, NIGERIA

JOURNAL OF RELIGION AND CULTURE

Volume 2 Number 2, 2001.

BOARD OF EDITORS

EDITOR

Rev. Dr. Vincent G. Nyoyoko

ASSISTANT EDITORS

Dr. E. S. Akama (*Review*)

Dr. D. I. Ilega (*Research*)

Dr. A. R. Kilani (*Secretary*)

EDITORIAL CONSULTANTS

Prof. Z. I. Oseni.

Prof. C. Oshun.

Prof. M. Opeloye.

Prof. N. S. S. Iwe.

Prof. I. Ejizu.

Prof. S. Ekpeyong.

Prof. S. I. Udoidem.

Prof. F. M. Mbon.

Prof. D. Udoette.

Dr. J. Moti.

Prof. T. A. Adamo.

Dr. M. Y. Nabofa.

ENQUIRIES AND SUBSCRIPTION

All enquires and subscription should be directed to Dr. A. R. Kilani (*Secretary*), Department of Religious and Cultural Studies, University of Port Harcourt, P. M. B. 5323, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

Manuscripts must be submitted at any time of the year in duplicate (15-20 A4 page of size paper) with a disk on Microsoft Word and their format must conform, to the latest edition of the MLA style sheet. Enclose a stamped, self addressed envelope.

The subscription price is as follows: - Nigeria: N500.00 (*Issue*) including postage, Others: \$16 & £15 (*Issue*) including postage

© Journal of Religion Culture

ISSN 1595-3971

CONTRIBUTORS

Dr. J. P. Ekarika - teaches at the department of Religious Studies and Philosophy, University of Calabar.

Ferdinand Nwaibgo - is of the Catholic Institute of West Africa, Port Harcourt.

Dr. John Obilor - is of the School of Humanities, Imo State University, Owerri and **Mr. Chinedu Chukuegu** - teaches at the Department of Creative Arts, University of Port Harcourt.

Ibrahim Uthman - teaches at the Department of Religious Studies, College of Education, Ikere- Ekiti.

Dr. Sam Nwigwe - is of the Department of Religion, University of Nigeria, Nsukka .

Akeem A. Akanni - teaches at the Department of Religious Studies, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun state.

Ernest Anyacho - is of Federal College of Education, Obudu, Cross River State.

Umulkhayr Labake Abdullah (Mrs.) - is of the Department of Curriculum Studies, University of Lagos.

Dr. Francis O. Njoku - teaches at the Claretian Institute of Philosophy, Maryland, Owerri.

Dr. Austin Echema - is of the Catholic Institute of West Africa, Port Harcourt.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page.

Inculturation: An On-going process in Christian History J. P. Ekarika	1
Faith and Science: From conflict to conversation Ferdinand Nwaigbo	15
The Practice of Inculturation as the Matrix of Faith- Culture conflict Resolution in Igboland John I.Obilor and Chinedu Chris Chukuegu	35
The Purdah Saga and the Muslim Woman Ibrahim Olatunde Uthman	47
The After life and Final End of Man in Igbo Concept Sam Nwigwe	63
The Intricacies of the Hijrah Calendar Akeem A. Akanni	78
Disability and Resilience in the Face of Stigmatization and Discrimination: The Case of the Igbo Ernest Anyacho	94
Domestic Violence and the Woman Question Umulkhayr Labake Abdullah	107
A Philosophic - Theological Rationalization on the Study of Divinities in African Traditional Religion (ATR) Francis O. Njoku	119
Funeral Rites: Challenge to Christians Austin Echema	137

THE PURDAH SAGA AND THE MUSLIM WOMAN

IBRAHIM OLATUNDE UTHMAN

Abstract

The Purdah saga is an age-long issue in Islam, which has generated a lot of controversies. A major problem posed by this saga is the impression that Muslim women are barred from outdoor activities or that they must cover their faces when they appear in public. This paper therefore focuses on the Islamic verdict on purdah and the submissions are based on the absolute sources of the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah.

Introduction

Contrary to popular notion engendered by the institution of purdah in Islam, many Prophetic traditions abound which support the participation of Muslim women in all socio-religious, political and economical activities. For instance, Aisha narrated that women used to pray behind the Prophet in his lifetime. They also used to observe the *Id* prayers with their male counterparts after which the Prophet would ask them to give out charity. In fact, there is a particular tradition of the Prophet that commanded that all women including those in their menstrual periods should attend the *Id* festivals. The Prophet also banned men from preventing their women from attending prayers in the mosques.

Muslim women also took part in the educational programme of the Prophet. The Prophet used to teach them together with men but later they requested for a special day to be set-aside for them alone and this was assented to by the Prophet. Aisha therefore declared that nothing could prevent women from learning during the Prophet time, not even modesty. She herself became the first product of the Prophet's school from whom leading companions came to learn Hadith, history and poetry among others.

In the same vein, Muslim women partook in both political and economic activities. They were consulted by the Prophet on important state matters and they took part in the selection of Uthman Ibn Affan as the third Caliph. Umar, the second Caliph actually appointed a woman,

Shaffiah bint Abdillah into his cabinet as the director of market affairs. This is no doubt in line with the Quranic verdict which enjoins both men and women to enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong (Qur'an 9:71). In the same Holy Qur'an, women are enjoined to earn a living and own what accrues to them there from (Qur'an 4:3). This afforded Muslim women the economic power to contribute to the upkeep of their family voluntarily. For instance Asma' Bint Abi Bakr used to work on the field of her husband and once met Prophet on her way who invited her to join his company and that of his companion⁴

Origin Of Purdah

Purdah as a system of seclusion is an ancient custom that preceded the advent of the Holy prophet. It was a national custom in both India and Persia from where the word purdah originated. For instance, it existed among the upper classes in India where there was seclusion of Indian women of rank.⁵ Purdah was also in vogue among the Arabs in pre-Islamic era. For instances, An-Nabigah, a *jahili* poet in one of his verses while describing *Al-mutajarradah*, the wife of Numan ibn al-mundhir says: "The veil fell down against her wish, she picked it with one hand and covered her face with the other"⁶

In Arabic language, the equivalent word for purdah is *Hijab* which means barrier, screen, curtain or women's veil among others.⁷ *Hijab* according to Elias is anything that acts as a barrier between two things and in all places where the word occurs in the Holy Qur'an, it implies all or some of the above meanings.⁸ Incidentally, the only place where the word *Hijab* is used as a system of seclusion or veiling of the face is in the Holy Qur'an chapter 33:53. It states:

And when you ask for anything from them (the wives of the prophet) ask them from behind the screen or veil (*Al-Hijab*); that is purer for your hearts and theirs and it is not right for you to annoy the messenger of Allah nor that you should marry his wives after his death, verily such a thing is a great sin in the sight of Allah.

From the above Quranic injunctions, it is clear that the system of seclusion or *purdah* was prescribed only for the wives of the Holy Prophet and that it is not unconnected with the second prescription - that the wife of the prophet should not remarry after the Prophet's death - thus the

wisdom of asking the wives of the Prophet to cover the faces was simply to make it easy for Muslim men to cast away their eyes from them and not to nurse any false hope or desires of marrying them after the Prophet's demise."

As for the generality of Muslim women, they are not included in the above prescription but were later commanded in a later revelation to wear outer garments.

O Prophet tell your wives, daughters and the believing women that they should cast their outer garments over them. That is most proper for them so that they may be known and not molested and Allah is Most Forgiving, Most Merciful." (Qur'an 33:59).

The word translated as "outer garments" in the above verse *Jalabih* which is the plural of *jilbab* which means flowing gown or garment. It also means a large garment or dress and is referred to as garment, dress and gown of women.¹⁰ This shows clearly that the prescription in this verse does not include the covering of the face. It is also clear from the above injunctions that the wearing of outer garments also includes the wives of the prophet as it was meant to enhance the status of Muslim women so that they may be respected and not molested.

Genesis Of Its Controversy

The genesis of the controversy over the status of *purdah* in Islam can first be sought in the aberration that arose when the opinions of Muslim scholars were substituted for the *Shar'iah*. According to the author of *Fiqh as-sunnah*, Sayyid Sabiq:

With blind allegiance and tribal leaning to schools of thought, the *Ummah* lost the guidance of the Qur'an and Sunnah. And there arose the statement that the door of *Ijtihad* was shut and the *shar'iah* became the sayings of scholars and the sayings of scholars became the *shar'iah*. Anybody who disagreed with the sayings of scholars was declared an innovator whose sayings could

not be relied upon and whose religious verdicts should not be upheld.¹¹

In essence, the controversy over the position of Islam on *purdah* could only have arisen because of the stagnation of Islamic scholarship during the period of decadence in Islamic history. For instance, the door to *Ijtihad* which is the recognition of the divine role given to man in the interpretation of the *Shar'iah* was not only shut officially around 1258 A.C.¹² it was also declared a sin that took a Muslim outside the pale of Islam.¹³ Yet, it was the permissibility of *Ijtihad* that afforded the early scholars the opportunity to give their own comments and interpretations of the laws contained in the Qur'an and Sunnah. This in turn led to the emergence of different schools of *fiqh*. Out of which four schools have come to be accepted by the majority of Muslim scholars as the most valid alternative interpretations of the *Shar'iah*.

A major fallout of the shutting of the "door of *Ijtihad*" is *Taqlid* or blind allegiance to the sayings of a scholar(s) or school(s) of *fiqh*. According to *Shaykhal -al-Hadith*¹⁴ Muhammad Nasir-d-din Albani, majority of those who support the imposition of the covering of the face on Muslim women do so because of their blind allegiance to the school of *fiqh* or environment where they grew up.¹⁵ This has led to so many scholars sticking to the views of others especially where they are the leading scholars. But surprisingly none of the four great Imams of the four recognised schools of *fiqh* claimed infallibility. On the contrary they admonished their followers against blind allegiance. For instance, Imam Malik once said

there is no other person apart from the prophet except that his saying could be accepted or rejected; I am but a man, I succeed and I fail, whichever of my opinion corresponds with the Qur'an and Sunnah, accept, and whichever does not, reject.

In addition, the view that *purdah* is mandatory on all Muslim women could also be traced to the belief that the sexual and moral looseness and misconduct prevalent today can only be curbed by asking women to cover the most tempting and dangerous portion of their body -the face-. According to Albani, many scholars today know that *purdah* is not

mandatory on Muslim women but argue that, it is a means to an end. They feel that sexual and moral evils in the society are so rampant and the *Shar'iah* permits prohibiting the ways to evil even if the ways are Permissible.¹⁷ According to Albani, such scholars forget that even at the time of the prophet *zina*(adultery) was very rampant, yet, *purdah* was never mandated. He concluded that *sadd-adharia h* or blocking the way, a form of legislation under the *Shar'iah* can only be resorted to if the existing provisions in the *Shar'iah* cannot solve the problem.¹⁸

However, the final stroke that makes it difficult for many scholars to ascertain the status of *purdah* in Islam took place when an ugly and disgusting perversion happened in Islamic history. This was the introduction of the harem system by the Umayyad regime where there was no limit to the number of wives and concubines of the kings and courtiers.¹⁹ The Abbasid regime came to perfect this system.²⁰

According to Sidiqqi, the strict seclusion and total segregation of Muslim women by the rulers, the feudal barons and other sections of the people who were dependent on the monarchs became inevitable.²¹ In any case, according to him, the barriers erected by the kings and monarchs between their wives and concubines and the outside world was borne out of the probability that many of the women would remain sexually dissatisfied.²²

It is obvious from the foregoing that in order to resolve the controversy on the status of *purdah* in Islam and give the authentic Islamic prescriptions on the system, one must refer to the verdicts contained in the Qur'an, Hadith, *Athar* or sayings of the companions as well as the verdicts of *fiqh* or Islamic jurisprudence. One must also refer to the views of leading Muslim scholars such as Ibn Kathir, In Hajar Al-Asqalani, Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Muflih, Ibn Qudamah and Ibn Hazm among others.

In the remaining few sections of this paper, it is hoped that the true teachings of Islam on the system of *purdah* shall be arrived at through an in-depth study of all the above texts and verdicts.

Quranic Verdict

The Holy Qur'an is the first primary or absolute source of the *Shar'iah* and a "Code of Conduct" for every believer.²³ According to Doi, in order to interpret the Holy Qur'an, every word should be explained with

its real meaning, everything should be explained with reference to the context of the main theme of the revelation and lastly the interpretation must not contradict the sayings and writings of the prophet's companions²⁴

In line with the above guidelines, the Qur'anic verses and passages on *purdah* and dressing of Muslim women and their conduct shall now be examined. As stated before, the only place where *purdah* or its equivalent, *Hijab* is mentioned in the Holy Qur'an is Qur'an 33:53. According to Anas Ibn Malik, the personal servant of the prophet who said "None knows more than myself about the revelation related to the confinement of his (prophet's) wives." Ubay bin K'ab used to ask him about the Prophet's marriage to Zainab bint Jahsh. The prophet as bridegroom invited the people in the morning to a feast. Most took the meal and went away. A group of them, however, remained with the prophet and stayed rather long. The prophet stood up and went out. Anas followed him so that they might likewise go. The prophet walked up to the threshold of Sayyidah Aisha's room and thought that by that time they might have gone. But when he returned, Anas after him, to Zainab's that group was still sitting and had not dispersed. The prophet returned and again Anas followed, till he reached the threshold of Sayyidah Aisha's room that they might go. It was only when they returned that they had just gone out.

As a consequence the verses relating to confinement were revealed. A curtain was then lowered between Anas and the Prophet's private quarters²⁵ - The same Anas also reported that Umar said "My lord granted me three wishes". One of which was when he told the prophet that "O Prophet the pious as well as the dissolute enter your house to meet your wives. How about ordering them to withdraw themselves". Subsequently, the verses of confinement were sent down.²⁶ This is also supported by the narration of Aisha. She is quoted as saying that Umar Ibn al-khattab asked the prophet to confine his wives but the prophet did not do so, then God sent down the verses relating to confinements.

From the above testimonies of the personal servant of the Prophet, Anas Ibn Malik and the Prophet's wife, Aisha, it is obvious that the verse of the veil or confinement was revealed in relation to only the wives of the prophet. The wisdom of asking the wives of the prophet to cover their faces or to screen themselves from the companion or other strange men -

as stated before - is simply to make it easy for Muslim men to cast away their desires from them and not to nurse any False hope of marrying them after the death of the prophet. Since in the same verse of confinement, Allah forbids the believers from marrying any of the prophet's wife after his death, the confinement of the prophet's wives will therefore make the injunction practicable. (For instance, a companion of the Prophet wanted to marry Aisha and voiced out his intention before the revelation of the verse of confinement of the veil.²⁸

Another confirmation that the verse of the veil or seclusion was restricted to the wives of the Prophet is the exclusion of Qilah bint Qais from the commandment. The Prophet got married to her before his death. On his deathbed, the Prophet gave her the option to be separated from him and to remarry. She married a companion of the prophet, Ikrimah Ibn Hadramat during the reign of Abu-bakr and when Abu-bakr heard, he threatened to burn down their house. It was Umar Ibn alkhattab that bailed them out when he told Abu-bakr that Qilah bint Qais was not among the "mothers of the believers" because the prophet did not consummate his marriage with her and did not put her behind the veil.²⁹ According to the narration of Ibn Kathir, before the prophet died, Qilah had been divorced by him, so when she got married to Ikrimah Ibn Abi Jahl, Abu-bakr became annoyed that the wife of the Prophet married after his death but Umar told him "She is not one of his (Prophet's) wives as the Prophet did not make her his choice and he did not veil or screen her"³⁰. After that response Abu-bakr became satisfied and kept quiet.

Similarly, there is the case of Asma' Bint Nu'man Ibn Abi Al-jawn, the father gave her hand to the Prophet in marriage but the Prophet was forbidden by Allah from consummating the marriage. Asma' took up a place in Madinah and during the time of Umar, she got married to Al-Muhajir Ibn Abi Umayyah and this annoyed Umar. Asma' then wrote to Umar and said that the Prophet did not veil her because she was not one of the "mothers of the Believers."³¹

Another verse of the Holy Qur'an that confirms that veiling or confinement is confined to the wives of the Holy Prophet is Qur'an 33:59. This is the verse of *Jilbab* or the outer garments. It is reported by Aisha that Sawdah, a wife of the Prophet, went out for her need after the revelation of the verse of the veil or confinement and because she was a

fat woman, she could easily be recognised by anybody who knew her before she started using the *hijab*. Umar saw her and said "I swear by Allah that we can still recognise you. Sawdah, so be careful of how you go out". Sawdah went back and narrated the incident to the Prophet and on the spot the above verse of *Jalabih* or outer garments was revealed.³²

It is therefore clear from the above tradition by Aishah that the verse of the outer garments is not the same as the verse of veil or seclusion. The above injunction is not for the wives of the Prophet to use the veil, which they had been using before its revelation. It was rather for them and every other muslim woman to wear the outer garment or a large and flowing gown hence it is directed to all Muslim women including the wives of the Prophet and his daughters.

The above interpretation of the verse of outer garment is also supported by Ibn Abbas who said "A woman should draw her outer garments close to her face and not over it"³³ This is similar to the statement of Qatadah on the verse when he said "Allah orders women to cover up to their eye brows and not over their faces".³⁴ As for a statement credited to Ibn Abbas that Allah orders women to cover their faces with their outer garments and to uncover only one eye,³⁵ it is not authentic because there is a serious defect in one of its transmitters, Abdullahi ibn Salih in addition to the doubt whether Ibn Abi Talhah actually heard the statement from Ibn Abbas.³⁶

Furthermore, Ibn Hajar while commenting on the verse of outer garments and the Hadith of Aisha above said that Umar was troubled by the access of strangers to the wives of the Prophet until he mentioned it to the Prophet that he should screen his wives. He emphasised it until the verse of the veil was revealed. Then he desired that they should not be seen at all though they were veiled but his request was denied and they were allowed to go out for their needs.³⁷ Thus when the first desire of Umar - that the wife of the Prophet should be screened - was granted, it was directed only to the Prophet's wives but in answer to his second request which was not granted, the prescription in the verse of the outer garments was directed to all Muslim women.³⁸

There is yet a lengthy passage in the Holy Qur'an regarding the exclusion of Muslim women from the injunction on veiling or screening the face. The passage is Qur'an 24:30-31 which goes thus:

And say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their chastity. This is purer for them, verily Allah has knowledge of what they do. And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their chastity and they should not display their beauty except what appears there-of and that they should draw their veils over their bosoms.

Various incidents have been narrated as the causes of revelation of the above passage, which indicate that Muslim women are not required to be veiled or screened from men. For instance, it is narrated by Ali that a man and a woman once gazed at each other's face and Satan tempted the two of them and they were bewitched by each other. The man continued to stare at the woman while walking, beside a wall until he hit the wall and cut his nose. The man then went to the Prophet and told him the incident and the Prophet said "that is the punishment of your sin" and the passage was revealed.³⁹ It is also noted that the passage was revealed after a companion of the Prophet Azma' visited her tribe, Banu Harithah, to her dismay she was met by some women without skirts and with bared chests and hairs.⁴⁰ Another cause of revelation according to the commentators of the Holy Qur'an such as Ibn Kathir and Qurtabi is that women in *jahiliyyah* (pre-Islamic era) used to cover their heads with headgears and uncover their chests, necks, ears, and arms. They were therefore ordered by Allah to draw their headgears over their bosoms.⁴¹

What can be drawn from the above is that both women and men in Islam are required to lower their gaze when they come into contact and to cover their *satar* or nudity. This is confirmed by the Hadith of Aisha that when the above passage was revealed, women came to pray in the mosque behind the Prophet in their wrappers without veiling their faces.⁴² The women did not veil their faces because it was not part of their *satar* and not because the verse of the veil had not being revealed. The above passage was revealed after the battle of *Banu Mustaliq*⁴³. According to Aisha she was veiled or screened from men during the expedition⁴⁴

In addition, "And they should not display their beauty except what appears there-of" - in the passage - according to Ibn Abbas, Ibn Umar,

Anas Ibn Malik, Abu Hurayrah and Aisha, women are allowed to uncover their faces and hands. For instance, Ibn Abbas said "It means what is in the face and the two hands e.g. antimony and ring". He also said that the face and the two hands are parts of the beauty that can be exposed⁴⁵ but Aisha said it refers to the bangles of the toes⁴⁶

One last evidence in the Holy Qur'an that confirms that the generality of Muslim women are not required to be in purdah is the following verse:

As for the aged women who have stopped childbirth and menstruation and who desire no marriage again, there is no sin on them if they lay aside their garments provided that they display not their beauty and for them to restrain is best for them for Allah sees and knows all things (Qur'an 24:60).

According to Assabuni, the above verse means that "There is no blame or sin on them (women) if they remove some of their dresses e.g. cloak and large outer garments and they appear before men in their indoor and normal dress provided they do not throw away prudence and excite lust".⁴⁷

This is the interpretation of the companions of the Prophet and their followers. Ibn Jarir relates that it is the interpretation of Ibn Mas'ud and Ibn Abbas which is authenticated by Al-Qurtabi.⁴⁸ Ibn Jarir and Abu-bakr Al-Jassas also relate from Jabir Ibn Zaid that it means headgear.⁴⁹ This is enough as evidence that what Muslim women are required to wear is the outer garment or headgear which are synonymous since they both do not include veiling the face and the two hands.

Al-Qurtabi also supports the interpretation of the above as headgears. According to him, By permitting women to lay aside some of their dresses in the same surah or chapter where the commandment to draw the headgears over the bosom is given, it means Allah is giving an exception to the earlier injunction. He also adds that the woman referred to in the above verse is the old woman for the Arab refer to a woman as *wadi'* when she attains old age or reaches an advanced age. It is therefore

such a woman that can lay aside her *Mihnah* or *Khimar*.⁵⁰

Sunnah Verdict

Sunnah is the second primary and absolute source of the Shar'iah. Sunnah or Hadith stands as the hidden revelation (*wahy khafi*) and is required in the interpretation of the entire message of the Qur'an and in the formation of the Islamic system.⁵¹ Sunnah can either be *Qawliyyah*, *Fi'iliyyah* or *Tagririyyah* which denote the sayings and deeds of the Prophet and his silent approval of the sayings and deeds of his companions.⁵² The last should not be equated with *Athar* which is the statement of a companion and not a Hadith.⁵³

As the second authority in the formation of Islamic law, the Sunnah or Hadith of the Prophet on purdah will now be examined. A very useful and relevant evidence in this regard is the observation of Anas Ibn Malik that whenever the Prophet took the charge of a woman, the companions would know if the woman was his wife if he veiled her from people. For instance, when he took Safiyyah bint Uyayy under his charge, the companions said "we do not know if he took her for a wife or *Ummul-walad*. If he put her behind the veil then she is his wife and if not then she is *Ummul-walad*". When the Prophet wanted to ride his camel, he veiled her from the people and confined her to his back on the camel so they knew that he had married her.⁵⁴ This shows clearly that the Sunnah of the Prophet was to put only his wives behind the veil.

Again, a companion of the Prophet Jabir Ibn Abdillah reported that he once observed the 1st prayer behind the Prophet and after the prayer and sermon, he moved to the women, admonished them and told them to give alms to ward off the torment of hell fire. Then a light complexioned woman in the middle of the women-folk asked "why Oh Prophet of Allah."⁵⁵ The reference to the complexion of the woman in the Hadith shows that women during the Prophet's time were allowed to uncover their faces when they went out. It may be argued that this incident happened before the revelation of the verse of the veil or seclusion but this is incorrect as it was confirmed in another Hadith by Umm Atiyyah that it happened in the sixth year of Hijrah,⁵⁶ while the verse of the veil according to all companions of the Prophet was revealed either in the third or fifth year of Hijrah.⁵⁷

Furthermore, Jarir Ibn Abdillah reported that he asked the Prophet about an accidental gaze and he commanded him to lower his gaze. According to Al-Qadi Iyyad, the Hadith is an evidence that it is not obligatory for a woman to veil her face. Rather it is the man that is required to always lower his gaze.⁵⁸ This interpretation is supported by the hadith of Ibn Abbas where Fadl Ibn Abbas and a beautiful woman of the tribe of khath'a'm were staring at each other. Then the Holy Prophet turned away the face of Fadl to the other side.⁵⁹ It is thus clear that it is the lowering of the gaze that is compulsory and not the confinement or veiling of Muslim women. If it is argued that the Prophet did not command the woman to veil because she is old and permitted to unveil or because she is performing hajj, the answer to the first excuse is that the woman was not old but in her youth hence the Prophet called her *Shababih* while he called Fadl *Shab*.⁶⁰ As for the second excuse, Ali Ibn Abi Talib reported that the incident happened on the day of sacrifice after the rituals of hajj had been completed so the woman was not in the state of Ihram.⁶¹

Closely related to the above is also the hadith of a woman who came to offer herself in marriage to the Holy Prophet. It is narrated by Sahl Ibn Sa'd that the woman told the Prophet "I have come to offer myself to you in marriage". Then the Prophet looked up at her and approved of her beauty but kept quiet. In another narration he said "I am not in need of a wife."⁶² Since the incident also happened after the commandment to the wives of the Prophet to veil themselves from strangers, it therefore supports the permissibility of unveiling before strangers by women who were not the wives of the Prophet.

In the tenth year of Hijrah, a companion of the Prophet, Subay'a'h bint Harith lost her husband in the farewell pilgrimage while she was pregnant. She gave birth to a child before the expiration of four months and ten days after her husband's death. When she completed her *nifas* or postnatal bleeding, she beautified her face and hands and went out but she met Abu Sanabil Ibn Ba'kak who accused her of wanting to get married before completing four months and ten days *iddah* (waiting period). She reported the incident to the Prophet who told her that she completed her *iddah* when she gave birth.⁶³ This hadith also confirms the exclusion of Muslim women from the verse of the veil hence 'ubay'a'h was able to beautify her face and hands with antimony.

Similarly, it is related by Aishah that Asma' her sister once came to visit her in the presence of the Prophet and was wearing a thin dress. The Prophet turned away his face and said "Oh Asma' when a woman attains puberty, it is not permissible to see any part of her body except the face and the hands"⁶⁴ Though the above hadith is *mun'sal*, with a break in his chain of transmission, it has been reported through many other sound transmissions. For instance, Ibn Jarir reported from Aishah that when her uncle's daughter (Muzimah) visited her, the Prophet also told her, "when a woman attains puberty, it is unlawful for her to display her body except the hands and the face"⁶⁵ Qatadah also reported that the Prophet said "when a lady starts menstruating, it is not proper to see of her body except the face and the hands up to the elbows"⁶⁶ Tabrani, Bayhaqi and Adh-dhahabi all confirmed the authenticity of the hadith.⁶⁷

In the conduct of Fatimah, the daughter of the Prophet is also a proof that *purdah* is not binding on the generality of Muslim women. Anas Ibn Malik reported that the Prophet once took a slave to Fatimah as a gift and she was wearing such a cloth that when she covered her legs, it did not reach her head and when she covered her head it did not reach her legs. When the Prophet saw her predicament in covering herself, he said "there is no sin on you because it is only your father and your slave"⁶⁸ It is of great importance to note that Fatimah did not make any attempt to cover her face whereas she was struggling to cover her head and legs.

In the same vein, the report of Aishah that women used to observe the dawn prayer wrapped in their wrappers while it was still dark also proves that women did not veil their faces. In the narration Aishah added that "They would return to their houses after prayers and none would recognise them on account of darkness"⁶⁹ It is clear from the narration that the reason why women were not recognised was not because they were in *purdah* or wearing black dresses but because it was still dark. Our last evidence from the Sunnah that proves that the commandment regarding *purdah* is restricted to wives of the Prophet was the Prophet's instruction to a companion, Fatimah bint Qais to observe her *iddah* (waiting period) in the house of Ibn Maktum. He preferred the place because Ibn Maktum was blind and that would give Fatimah freedom to remove her clothes.⁷⁰ Yet, the same Prophet ordered two of his wives, Umm Salamah and Maymunah to observe *purdah* or the veil before the same Ibn Maktum. Even when

they complained that he was blind, he replied "Are you also blind?"⁷¹ This shows clearly that the injunction for the wives of the Prophet in relation to purdah is different from that of the generality of the Muslim women.

Conclusion

Purdah or the system of seclusion and veiling of women from strangers is an ancient custom that preceded the advent of the Prophet. It was however prescribed for the wives of the Prophet to make it easy for the Companions to cast away their eyes from them and not to nurse the desire of marrying them after the Prophet's demise because of their status as *Ummat al-Muminin* or mothers of the faithful. As for the generality of Muslim women, they are only required to wear outer garments or *Jilbab*. The major factor responsible for the controversy over the status of Purdah in Islam can therefore be traced to the introduction of *Taqlid* in Islamic history as well as the harem system during the Umayyad and Abbasid regimes.

Nevertheless, this paper has revealed that Muslim women are allowed to partake in outside work for the reconstruction of the society. Even the wives of the Prophet took active part in the development, construction and defence of Madinah. This is why Muslim women are not excluded from the acquisition of knowledge in Islam. On the contrary, it is incumbent on them. For if they must carry out such professional duties as teaching, nursing the wounded and managing economic investments as mentioned in this paper they must be versed in all disciplines such as teaching, medicine, banking and finance, engineering and Islamic studies.

Notes And References

1. For details on these and many other traditions of the Prophet, see M. N. Al-Albani, *Hijab al-mar'ah al-muslimah fil kitab Was-sunnah*, Beirut, Maktab al-Islami, 1389 A.H., p. 24 and Uthman, I.O. "An Investigation of the Status of Muslim Women in Ibadan and Its Environs" M.A. Thesis, Dept of Religious Studies Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, 2000 pp. 38 - 48.
2. *Ibid.* p. 48, and M. N Sddiqi, *Women in Islam*, Lahore, Institute of Islamic Culture, 1975, p. 26 and Khan, M.M. *Sahih Al-Bukhari (Summarized Version)*, Riyad, Maktaba Dar-s- salam Publishers and

- Distributors, 1994 p 1997
3. *Ibid.*
4. Uthman, I.O. *The Hijab of the Muslim Woman and A Call to every Reformer*, Abeokuta, The Islamic Conscious Group, 1997, p.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Uthman I.O. (1997) *The Hijab of the Muslim woman and a call to Every Reformer*, Abeokuta, The Islamic Conscious Group p.1
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.* p.6.
10. *Ibid.* p.9.
11. S. Sabiq (1995) *Fiqh as-sunnah*, Beirut: Dar al-Fikr Vol.1 p.°.
12. A. R. I Doi (1984) *Shariah the Islamic law*, London: Taha publishers, p.78.
13. M. H. Haykal. (1976) *The life of Muhammad* (US: North America Trust Publications, pp.583.
14. Is the highest authority that can be obtained in hadith literature from Saudi Arabia and Muhammad Nasir-d-din Al-bani is said to be the foremost Hadith authority of our time.
15. M. N Albani (1389 A.H.) *Hijab Al-mar'ah Al-muslimah fil Kita Was-sunnah*, Beirut: Almaktab Al-Islam p.4..
16. Uthman I.O. op.cit p.2.
17. Albani M.N. Op.cit pp.4-S.
18. *Ibid.*
19. Uthman I.O. Op.citp.3.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Sidiqqi, M.M. (1975) *Women in Islam*, Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture pp.212-213.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Doi, A.R.I. op.cit. p.21.
24. *Ibid.* p.22.
25. Turabi, H. (1991) *Women in Islam and Muslim Society*, Minna: Islamic Education Trust pp.26-27.
26. *Ibid.* p.26.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Uthman I.O. op.cit p.6.
29. *Ibid.* p.5.
30. Ibn kathir (N.D.) *Tafsir Al-Qur'an al-Adhim*, Damascus: Dar Al-Qur'an Vol 111 p.⁴⁸⁰.

- 31 I. O. Uthman Op. cit p. 6.
32 *Ibid.*, p. 10.
33 Albani, M. N. Op. cit p. 2.
34 *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.
35 M. N. Assabuni A. (1981) *Safwah at-Tafa'ir*, Beirut: Dar alQur'an-
Karim Vol. 12, p. 72.
36 Albani Op. cit p. 90.
37 *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49.
38 Uthman Op. cit p. 9.
39 Assabuni Op. cit Vol. 10 p. 13.
40 Uthman Op. cit 10.
41 Albani Op. cit p. 78.
42 *Ibid.*, 79.
43 Maududi (N.D.) *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, Delhi: Board of
Islamic Publications Vol. IV p. 269.
44 Uthman Op. cit p. 6.
45 Uthman Op. cit p. 11.
46 *Ibid.*
47 Assabuni Op. cit Vol. 10, p. 40.
48 Albani, Op. cit pp. 18 and 114.
49 *Ibid.*, pp. 3 and 114.
50 *Ibid.*, p. 52.
51 Doi, op. cit p. 45.
52 Uthman Op. cit, pp. 13 and 15.
53 *Ibid.*, p. 24.
54 Albani op. cit pp. 45-46.
55 *Ibid.*, pp. 21-23.