

Beauty of Concealment and Concealment of Beauty

Address by Sister Zahra Rahnavard at the Seminar for Studying Hijab.

The Seminar for Studying Hijab was held on Sunday, 16th Dey 1364 (5th January 1986) at Farhang Hall. It was attended by some Members of the Majlis (Iranian Parliament), experts and officials of the Educational Affairs Section, Sector 11, Department of Education, Tehran. At this Seminar Sister Zahra Rahnavard gave a speech on "Zeebaiye Hijab va Hijabe Zibayi" (Beauty of Concealment and Concealment of Beauty). In view of the unique views, beautiful approach and deep study of the problem, full text of the address is given below.

Hijab is like a scenery, a panorama or a garden, a garden full of fruits of different colours. You can select anyone of the thousands of rooms with thousands of windows, and from its frame look at the garden, stretch your hand and pick off a fruit. You can pick off the entire garden at one and the same time like a single fruit, satisfy with its flavour your heart and soul, and make the garden, the hijab, a solace for your (disturbed) inner self.

Of all the myriad windows through which one can look into the garden, let us have a look at Hijab through the window of beauty, a deep window, a window made of the wood of Sidra (the Lote Tree in the Seventh Heaven) with the scent of eternal memories, a latticed window with variegated glass, illumining your soul with multicolour lustre, a window of beauty of age-long human civilization, a window of centuries old human presence on the earth, or even older, a window dating back to the very age of creation or existence itself, a window of beauty!

The garden and the window, the concealment and the beauty often come close to merge in each other, and sometimes withdraw from each other.

Innumerable mysterious and esoteric windows open before this garden. So why should we study Hijab (or concealment) from the angle of beauty? ...Really, why?

For example, we can look at Hijab through the window of Imperialism, and sit down and analyze it. Due to the strategic importance and the immense mineral resources, our dear motherland has ever been subjected to invasion by the super-criminals who have always been interested in getting hold of this politico-geographically sensitive area and through the most intricate conspiracies for eroding our Islamic identity have endeavoured to deprive our nation of all the vestiges of self-defence.

Fifty years ago it was on the 17th Dey (7 January) that, in servile obedience to the orders of the British and Americans, Reza Khan the accursed, ordered the abolition of hijab for women in Iran. In fact, he pulled down the national flag which was a symbol of independence and honour of Iran, and this served as a prologue to the future tragic drama of the loss of identity and the encroachment of foreign culture on the country.

We may look at the hijab from the window of economy, and then construe the abolition of hijab as an Imperialist plot for the inflow of the putrefied surplus products of the Western Capitalist countries like the readymade garments, cosmetics and even the attractive bodies of women for the publicity of the surplus commodities manufactured in their factories.

We may look at the abolition of hijab from the angle of the Imperialist morality which throws women before the eyes of the young as something pretty, snatching from them their senses and reason so that, subsequent to the loss of the sensible minds and firm resolution of the youth, the imperialists could plunder the natural wealth and resources of our country.

We may also look at the abolition of hijab from the cultural strategy of Imperialism, and then find the woman exploited as a stronghold of the western cultural domination and Occidentosis, and through the agency of "la belle dame" the Imperialists have not only bombarded our religious and national bases, but have even manouvred the complete devastation and annihilation of the sublime values like the pious feelings of love and affection, honour, dignity and sacrifice.

Today, however, we are not going to look through any of these windows. Beauty in a psychological perspective and in direct relation with hijab has kept so many persons mentally and psychologically occupied persons who, in Iran or elsewhere, are connected with this concealment or have a problem with its content or form.

The addressee of this discourse is not a lady who is a principal, teacher, official, worker, doctor, specialist, housewife, or a school or college student. The addressees are rather the pious souls of all the women of the country striving for the elevation of the women's position.

I firmly believe that they are all noble persons, possessing gentle souls and have drunk deep from the pure spring of "the Eternal Being", and in this material world are waiting to receive the illuminating radiance of Truth.

They are noble, modest and peerless, except, indeed, a very small group of those women politically

attached with the former regime who, by their heart and deeds, are still linked with the Western political and economic imperialism and receive their guidance and propaganda instructions from the foreign radios and centres of crime like CIA and Mossad in order to pollute and corrupt our Islamic society with full knowledge and intention.

Such elements form hardly one per cent of the aggregate in our society. I sit beside the clean souls of women, while I am fully confident that once the necessary economic reforms, so eagerly awaited by all of us, are introduced, most of the cultural losses of deviation including the issues relating to hijab and the relevant excesses and shortcomings on the subject shall also be restrained. Let us go back to "the frame of beauty".

Today most of the young women and girls, who have adopted hijab in toto and have been completely enamoured by it, have reached the truth that concealment in entirety is beautiful. What kind of beauty is this?

On the other hand, those who have adopted hijab halfheartedly, or have tolerated it under duress, in spite of possessing clean and spotless frames, try to conceal their beauty by myriad forms, fashions, hues and dyes and cosmetics, as they feel that hijab shall bring down the standard of their beauty. What a strange meaning of beauty!

What is beauty? Where is its realm? But, O Woman, the character of the society is strangeness. The society itself breeds concealment. What type of concealment? In your own environment. your own society, there are innumerable curtains, which have been drawn on the beauty of your being. Why don't you see these curtains? Who are you?

In the society, you adapt yourself according to the judgements of the society. Within your work environs, you accept the behaviour, the type of dress, the conditions of concealment prevalent in your environment. Throughout your life, each place, every moment, each incident, every event throws a new curtain on your personality the curtain of class, the curtain of shape, the curtain of status, the curtain of reputation and the curtain of respectability. But who are you? What are you? The countless curtains lead you to the loss of your identity your own being.

After all we are not like the Marxists who believe that man's identity is nothing but what is determined by the economic class to which he belongs. On the contrary, we believe that every person is "something", is a reality in himself, greater than what is granted by the society, history, class, relations or connections. The subject of self-alienation which is propounded in connection with hijab has also been alluded to in the various ideologies. For example, a Marxist believes that the exploitation and the presence of the worker in the Capitalist production within an industrialized society which takes place through profiteering have led to the worker's self-estrangement. This is an economic interpretation of self-alienation.

Existentialism explains self-alienation in a different way. According to it the presence of man as a sole voluntary, conscious being in an inert, unconscious world and also in a society where the system and its

conventions are quite foreign to his internal inclinations, gives birth to self-estrangement.

According to the explanation forwarded at this point by us, a woman in all other systems, in whatever conditions and environs, wraps her real beauty into the curtains of a variety of relations and connections. The Islamic hijab, in our connotation, is by itself a source of drawing all these curtains aside and providing her the possibility of uniting with the real beauty of her being and rediscovering her own self. This social harmony proves to be an introduction through close affinity and sincerity to her real self for the attainment of the sublime origin and supreme source of her own self or Allah, and this is the gnostic unity.

Man has not a mere economic and historic nature. These are mere curtains, intertwined, curtains over a pure and clean beauty of being. All the social positions are mere curtains drawn over the real beauty of human essence. There is inside yourself a being which, in all-earnest and anxiety, expects that you will discover it, will be sincere to it, will come to its rescue, will be in unison with it, will be all one with it, will hold it and it will hold you, so that you may return to your original source.

But you have kept distance from it through innumerable curtains, have completely estranged yourself from it and have left it alone. Or perhaps, you have missed it. The entire beauty of concealment lies here. As soon as you own it, all the false identities of probability shall be gone, and your mundane status, pomp and show and material acquisitions shall disappear. You will give up the symbol of your individualism, and will become like all the others, like me, like him, like all of us, a worker, an official, a teacher, a doctor or a student.

You will give up all the ostentatious distinctions and will be able to reach the estranged, real self, the self having a sublime and beautiful origin, a divine origin, and a manifestation of the divinity of God, God, who is Beautiful. In other words, now that you have attained unity at the level of the society, you may also reach unity at the level of existence.

Like the leaf of a tree, a spring, mountain, or a flower in a blowing wind or the flight of a bird, you step into the unique society of existence where all are occupied in His obeisance and prostration in His adoration. Isn't such a concealment really beautiful even more beautiful than the one you may ever run after the one which you may decorate with hues and colours in order to give yourself a prettier look but which, in fact, may drown you into you, into your own individualism, take you away from the real Beauty and would prove to be a curtain between you and Beauty .

On the one hand, beauty, the physical beauty, the visual beauty of the stature and outward appearance is itself an obstruction. The body is a curtain, (as the poet says)

"The dust of my body becomes an obstruction for the face of my soul. How happy will be the moment when I shall draw this curtain aside from the face"

The Western Renaissance was the revival of the Greek values that attached utmost importance to the

value of matter and body. In their belief beauty was virtue. Thus every beautiful person was virtuous and popular.

Venus, the goddess of Love and Beauty and Helen, the famous demigoddess of Troy, both were at the same time heroines of corruption, debauchery and perfidy, but how strange that they were worshipped by the Western Imperialist people whose values take roots from the Greek civilization.

These people always endeavoured to prove everywhere, particularly in their colonies, that physical beauty is the foundation of virtue. It is the body where lie beauty and virtue. As it is so, it must be exposed to the public eyes and judgement. The whole image of a woman in an Imperialist regime suffering from a cultural Imperialism is that of a beautiful being, and not the image of a mother or a source of an epic or great sacrifice. Thank God, our society has succeeded in giving birth to such great values. (Elsewhere) the idea of physical beauty is so strong that woman is also governed by it, and she finds satisfaction with herself only when she finds herself beautiful and her beauty a subject of public judgement.

This image of woman, a beautiful woman, also takes its roots as an established value in the minds of men, to the extent that even at the time of making the most important decision (in life), namely, marriage they are after finding a spouse possessing such physical qualities.

The demand of the society from a woman, the demand of a woman from herself and the demand of man from a woman all revolve round the physical beauty. But the real beauty lies in the moment the society, man and woman herself should demand from woman the beauty of the soul and the spirit and the human qualities and talents. The body which is destined to decay, to be mingled with the dust and produce (and be eaten by) worms, even at the pinnacle of its beauty is but an obstruction in the way to real beauty. The beauty of concealment, therefore, lies in the elimination of the physical values in order to revive the values of the real self of a woman in the mind of the society of man and woman.

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