

# Women's issues

## Introduction

There are specific laws for women in Islam that the books of jurisprudence have discussed in detail. However, as a result of being in the midsts of non-Muslim societies, new situations have come up that have given rise to new questions and inquiries.

## General Rules

450. A woman is allowed to keep her **face and hands** uncovered in the presence of a non-*mahram* man, provided that she does not fear of getting into a *haram* act, that the exposure of her face and hand does not cause men to gaze at her in a forbidden way, and that it does not give rise to immorality in general. Otherwise, it is obligatory on her to conceal [her face and hands], even from those who are *mahram* to her.

451. It is not permissible for a woman to expose the top part of her **feet** to a non-*mahram* onlooker. However, she is allowed to keep her feet —top as well as sole— exposed during *salat*, if she is in a place where she is immune from the looks of a non-*mahram* person.

452. A woman is allowed to use antimony (*kohl*) on her eyelashes and wear **rings** in both hands, provided that it is not intended for drawing lustful attention of men towards herself and that she is confident of not getting into a *haram* act. Otherwise, it is obligatory on her to cover [the eyes that have *kohl* and the hands with rings] even from those who are *mahram* to her.

453. It is permissible for a woman to go out, wearing perfume even if non-*mahram* men can smell her **perfume**; in so doing, she should not aim to arouse or attract such men.

454. It is permissible for a woman to ride in a car by herself with a non-*mahram* driver as long as she is confident of not getting into a *haram* act.

455. It is not permissible for a woman to masturbate until she reaches climax and has discharge. If she

did so, it is obligatory on her to perform major ablution (*ghusl*); and this *ghusl* will make up for *wudhu*, [if she intends to pray after that].

456. A woman who is barren is permitted to expose her private parts [to the doctor] for the sake of treatment, if she desperately needs to become pregnant and that failure to do so would place her in a difficulty of the kind that would normally exempt her from other obligations.

457. “The baby should be **breast fed** by its mother because it has been mentioned in *ahadith* that, ‘There is no milk that a baby drinks more blessed than the milk of its mother.’ It is better to breast feed the child for twenty–one months; it should not be less than that. Similarly, the child should not be breast fed for more than two years; it is better, if the parents agree on weaning the child earlier.”<sup>1</sup>

458. It is recommended for the wife to do the **household chores** and to provide the needs of the husband unrelated to conjugal matters like cooking, sewing, cleaning, laundry, etc. These things are not an obligation on her.

459. “It is permissible to **listen to** the voice of a non–*mahram* woman without any sexual overtures. “Similarly, it is permissible for her to make herself be heard by non–*mahram* men except when there is fear of getting sucked into a *haram* act. However, she is not allowed to soften or make her voice palatable to an extent that would normally arouse the listener, even if that person was *mahram* to her.”<sup>2</sup>

460. “If a woman is in need of medical examination to treat her disease and the non–*mahram* doctor is better equipped to treat her, that doctor is allowed to look at her body and touch it if need be. If it is possible to treat her by either of the two methods (looking or touching), he [should restrict himself to one and] would not be allowed to use the other [method].”<sup>3</sup>

461. Some scholars say, “In order to confine all kinds of sexual activity to wedlock and for the benefit of the husband, the wife and the entire family, Islam has imposed *hijab* on the woman when she meets the men who are not *mahram* to her.”<sup>4</sup>

462. Alfred Hitchcock, the famous movie producer said, “The eastern woman was very attractive by herself and this attraction gave her tremendous power. But by taking great steps in bringing herself on a par with her western sister, the eastern woman has gradually abandoned the *hijab*; and this has gradually decreased her attractiveness [and hence her power].”<sup>5</sup>

463. Will Durant, while discussing the sexual behaviour of women, said, “The woman knows that indecency leads to lower self–esteem and degradation, therefore she taught that to her daughter.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, by nature she is inclined towards decency and chastity; and that covering her body increases her honour and position in the eyes of men.

## Questions and Answers

464. **Question:** What is the ruling in the matter of a woman embracing another woman passionately, kissing, and flirting with her with sexual desire? What if they go even further and enter the domain of deviant sexual behaviour?

**Answer:** All of this is *haram* with varying degrees of prohibition.

465. **Question:** Very often women ask specific questions [related to women's issues] from inseminations. Is it permissible for them to ask explicitly, even though some questions might be of a private nature? Is it permissible for the students to answer them in the same explicit manner?

**Answer:** It is permissible for both parties for the sake of learning and teaching religious laws, but they both must have sincerity of intention, observe decency and decorum [in their speech], and refrain from explicitness in matters that are not appropriate to be expressed explicitly.

466. **Question:** During foreplay, a sticky substance is discharged in the woman's vagina; and when the foreplay continues, she sometimes has orgasm. Is it obligatory on her to perform major ablution (*ghusl*) when she reaches the first stage of discharge or only when she reaches the climax? And will this *ghusl* make up for *wudhu*?

**Answer:** *Ghusl* does not become *wajib* for the woman until she reaches the level of sexual excitement. Once she reaches that level and the liquid is discharged, it becomes obligatory on her to perform *ghusl* of *janabat* which should compensate for *wudhu*.

467. **Question:** During the pilgrimage season, women use some pills to delay the onset of their monthly period; when the period sets in, it comes with frequent intervals. Would the laws of menses apply on that discharge?

**Answer:** If it comes with interruption and does not continue —even inside the private part after the first initial discharge— for three days, the laws of menstruation should not apply.

468. **Question:** A vast majority of Muslim women who observe *hijab* are used to keeping their chins and a small part of the under chin exposed but they cover the neck. Is this permissible for them? And how big an area of the face women can expose? And are the ears included in that?

**Answer:** The ears are not part of the face, therefore it is obligatory to cover them. As for the part of the chin and the under chin that are seen when putting on the common head scarf, it is to be considered as part of the face.

469. **Question:** Is it permissible to shake hands with a non-*mahram* women who is advanced in age (*qawa'id*) and do not have high hopes of getting married? What is the approximate age for *qawa'id*?

**Answer:** It is not permissible to touch the body of a non-*mahram* woman at all, except when necessary. There is no specific age for the *qawa'id* because it varies from one woman to another; the criterion [of defining the *qawa'id*] is what has been mentioned in the [Qur'anic] verse: she should be advanced in age and do not aspire for marriage (24/60).

470. **Question:** If putting on the face veil (*an-niqab*) in a country [like England or America] sometimes arouses astonishment and inquiries, is it obligatory to take off such veil since it would become part of the *libasu 'sh-shuhra*?

**Answer:** It is not obligatory [to do so]. However, if wearing it arouses disapproval by and dislike of the general public in a particular country, it would be classified as "*libasu 'sh-shuhra*" in that country and it would not be permissible to wear it over there.

471. **Question:** Is it permissible for a woman in *hijab* to learn driving, if her instructor is a non-*mahram* and is alone with her during the driving lessons, provided that nothing *haram* takes place in the process?

**Answer:** It is permissible, provided that one is immune from falling prey to immorality.

472. **Question:** Some beautician outlets employ female staff. Is it permissible for a woman among the believers to engage in applying makeup of women —Muslim or non-Muslim— who do not observe *hijab* and who wear make up in the presence of non-*mahram* men?

**Answer:** If that work is considered as a contributing factor to the *haram* act and promoting it, she is not allowed to do it; however, such a consideration is truly far-fetched.

473. **Question:** Is it permissible for a woman who does not observe *hijab* to get rid of her facial hair, to straighten her eyebrows, and to wear natural and light make up?

**Answer:** Getting rid of facial hair and straightening the eyebrows do not prevent her from keeping her face open [while putting on the *hijab*], provided she is confident of not getting sucked into something *haram* and that exposing her face is not done with the intention of inviting *haram* looks.

474. **Question:** Is it permissible [for a woman] to dye her hair, fully or partially, in gatherings exclusively for women with the intention of attracting attention for the purpose of marriage?

**Answer:** If dyeing is for a cosmetic reason and not with the purpose of deceiving (like concealing a defect or old age), there is no problem in it.

475. **Question:** If a woman puts on a wig that covers her real hair for the purpose of beauty as well as *hijab*, is she allowed to expose her face now that it looks different?

**Answer:** She is permitted to use the wig, yet it is a beauty item that must be concealed from non-*mahram* men.

476. **Question:** There are some stockings whose colour matches that used to embellish the legs. Is it permissible for a young woman to wear it?

**Answer:** She is allowed to wear it, but if it is considered a beauty item, it is necessary to conceal it from non-*mahram* men.

477. **Question:** Is it permissible to wear stockings that conceal what is underneath it?

**Answer:** In principle, there is no problem in it.

478. **Question:** A Muslim woman nurse visits patients; part of her work involves touching the body of men, Muslims as well as non-Muslims. Is this permissible for her, knowing that leaving her job would make it hard for her to find work? And is there a difference between touching the body of a Muslim and that of a non-Muslim?

**Answer:** It is not permissible for a woman to touch the body of non-*mahram* man, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, except when it is necessary, in which case the prohibition is overridden.

479. **Question:** A Muslim woman wears high heel shoes that hit the ground in such a way that it draws attention. Is she allowed to wear it?

**Answer:** It is not permissible, if it is intended to draw the attention of non-*mahram* men to herself, or if it generally causes temptation [for committing sin].

480. **Question:** Is it permissible for a woman to wear rings, bangles, or necklace for the sake of beautification?

**Answer:** It is permissible and it should be concealed from non-*mahram* men except for the rings and bangles, provided that there is no danger of committing that which is *haram*, or that exposing them should not be with the intention of drawing forbidden attention.

481. **Question:** In the West it is possible to wear coloured contact lenses. Is it permissible for a Muslim woman to wear them for the sake of beautification and then appear in front of non-*mahram* men?

**Answer:** If that is considered as an item of cosmetics, it is not allowed.

482. **Question:** Is it permissible to sell ova of a woman? Is it permissible to buy them?

**Answer:** It is permissible.

483. **Question:** In some cases, women start losing their hair. Is it permissible for them to expose their hair to a doctor for the sake of treatment, irrespective of whether loss of hair entails difficulty for them, in that it is just for the sake of embellishment?

**Answer:** It is permissible in the case of difficulty that is normally unbearable; and not without it.

484. **Question:** Is it permissible for a Muslim woman to join a co-education college in the West in spite of the moral breakdown, and the laissez-faire attitude of some male and female students?

**Answer:** If she is confident that she can preserve her faith, fulfill her religious duties, including the *hijab*, refrain from *haram* looking and touching, and be immune to immoral and adverse atmosphere, there is no problem in it; otherwise, it is not allowed.

485. **Question:** In some Western countries, artists sit on the curb of public footpaths and paint pictures of those who wish to get their portraits drawn for a fee. They do so by asking their customers to pose for them, and then carefully observe their faces in order to paint their portraits. Is it permissible for a woman with *hijab* to ask the artist to draw her picture?

**Answer:** She should not do so.

486. **Question:** Is wrestling in its various forms permissible for women? And are women allowed to look at the semi-naked bodies of the wrestlers live or on television without lustful thoughts?

**Answer:** Wrestling is not allowed, if it involves hurting oneself or the opponent when it crosses the boundary of *haram*. It is obligatory on a woman not to look at the body of a man, innocently, even on television, with the exception of the head, hands and feet, and other parts that are not normally concealed.

487. **Question:** Is it permissible for women to look at the bodies of men who take off their clothes [i.e., shirts] during the mourning ceremony [when they do the *matam*]?

**Answer:** Based on obligatory precaution, they should refrain from it.

488. **Question:** A man voluntarily takes the responsibility of raising a girl, then she grows up into a woman. Is it obligatory on her to observe *hijab* in his presence? Is it obligatory on him not to look at her hair and not to touch her at all?

**Answer:** Yes, all that is obligatory; and her relations with him should be like that of a non-*mahram*.

489. **Question:** If pregnancy causes great difficulty for a daughter and a disgrace for her family, is she allowed to abort the foetus?

**Answer:** It is permissible before the soul enters the foetus, if the difficulty reaches a level that is usually unbearable and there is no way out for her except abortion

490. **Question:** Is a woman allowed to wear trousers and take to the streets and markets?

**Answer:** It is not allowed, if it reveals the contours of her body or would normally arouse temptation.

491. **Question:** Is it permissible to wear a wig with the purpose of drawing attention and embellishing oneself in gatherings that are exclusively for women? Is this counted as “concealing the shortcomings”?

**Answer:** There is no problem in it, if it is done only for beautification, and not for deceiving and concealing physical drawback, in the case of would-be marriage.

492. **Question:** Is it permissible for a woman in menses to recite more than seven verses from the Holy Qur’an (other than the verses that require obligatory prostration)? If it is permissible, is it disliked (*makrûh*)? And does that mean that she will be rewarded for reciting, albeit less [than normal]?

493. **Answer:** She is allowed to recite other than the verses that require obligatory prostration; and when it is said, “it is disliked to recite more than seven verses,” this means that the reward of such recitation will be less.

1. Sayyid as-Sistani, Minhajû’s-Saliheen, vol. 3, p. 120.

2. Ibid, p. 15.

3. Ibid, p. 13.

4. See Shaykh Murtaza Mutahhari, Masalatu ‘l-Hijab as quoted in the first issue of al-Kawthar, p. 92.

5. See al-Kawthar; [Translator’s Note: The quotation has been translated from Arabic. Original source not traceable.]

6. Translator’s Note: Translated from Arabic. Original source not traceable.

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