

## THE RELIGION OF ISLĀM

and going out for one's needs are quite different things. There is, therefore, no seclusion in Islām in the sense that women are shut up within their houses, for they are as free to move about for their needs, or the transaction of their affairs, as men. Only their needs outside the home are generally fewer, and their duties are to a large extent limited to the home.

The next question is, if women are commanded to veil themselves when they have to go out for their needs. These needs may be either religious or secular. Two prominent instances of the former are taking part in public prayers, and the performance of pilgrimage. If it had been necessary for women to wear veils, an injunction should have been given to wear them on these two sacred occasions, since these are the occasions on which men's sentiments should be purest, and when, therefore, all those things that excite the passions must be avoided. There is, however, not only no such injunction, but it was a recognized practice that women came into the congregation of men in mosques, unveiled (IJ-C. XVIII, p. 84). It is even admitted by the jurists that women should not veil themselves at prayers and on pilgrimage. In the conditions of prayer it is laid down that the body of the women must be covered entirely except her face and her hands (H. I, p. 88, *Shurūṭ al-Ṣalāt*). The exception of these two parts, it is added, is due to the fact that they must of necessity be left exposed. As regards pilgrimage, there is an express injunction in Ḥadīth that no woman shall put on a veil during the pilgrimage (Bu. 25 : 23). It is also a well-established fact that the mosques in the Prophet's time contained no screens to keep the two sexes separate. The only separation between the men and the women was that women stood

in separate rows behind the men. Otherwise they were in the same room or in the same yard, and the two sexes had to intermingle. In the pilgrimage, there was a much greater intermingling of the sexes, women performing circumambulations of the Ka'bah, running between Ṣafā and Marwah, staying in the plain of 'Arafāt and going from place to place, along with men, and yet they were enjoined not to wear a veil.

If then, as admitted on all hands, women did not wear a veil when the two sexes intermingled on religious occasions, when the very sacredness of the occasion called for a veil, if the veil was ever a necessity, it is a foregone conclusion that they could not be required to veil themselves when going out for their secular needs whose very performance would be hampered by the veil. And there is no such injunction either in the Holy Qur'ān or the Ḥadīth. In fact, no such injunction could be given when there existed an injunction that women shall remain unveiled in pilgrimage. This injunction rather shows that the veil was adopted simply as a mark of rank or greatness,<sup>1</sup> and the unveiling was required in order to bring all on a level of equality. However that may be, the order to remain unveiled in the pilgrimage is a clear proof that wearing the veil is not an Islamic injunction or practice. And the verses requiring both men and women to lower their gaze (see 24 : 30, 31 quoted above), show clearly that when the two sexes had to intermingle as a matter of necessity the women were not veiled, for otherwise there would

1. The veil is still a mark of rank. Ninety per cent. of the population in any country has to live on labour in which women are also required to take a share to a certain extent. Ninety per cent. of the Muslims living in rural areas cannot afford to have their women veiled. It is generally among the very few big zamīndārs in villages and in the higher and middle classes of the urban population that the women wear a veil.

have been no need for the men to keep their looks cast down. And to make the matter clearer still, it is added that they should "not display their ornaments, except what appears thereof." The part that necessarily appears is the face and the hands, and this is also the view of the vast majority of commentators (IJ—C. XVIII, p. 84 ; RM. VI, p. 52).<sup>1</sup> There is also a ḥadīth according to which the Holy Prophet is reported to have excepted the face and the hands from the parts which were required to be covered : "Asmā", daughter of Abū Bakr, came to the Holy Prophet, and she was wearing very thin clothes (through which the body could be seen). The Prophet turned away his face from her and said, O Asmā! when the woman attains her majority, it is not proper that any part of her body should be seen except this and this, pointing to his face and his hands" (AD. 31 : 30).

All that the Holy Qur'ān requires is that women should be decently dressed when they go out and that they should not

Decent dress.

1. Ibn Jarīr quotes three different explanations of *illā mā ṣāhara min-hā* (except what appears thereof) ; 1. The view of Ibn Mas'ūd that these words mean the adornment of dress ; 2. The view of Ibn 'Abbās, Sa'id, Dzāḥāk, 'Aṭā, Qatādah, Mujāhid and others that they mean the adornment which it is lawful for the woman to show, i.e., collyrium, ring, bangles and face ; 3. The view of Ḥasan that they mean the face and the clothes ; and then adds his own view in the following words

"The most correct explanation of these words is that they mean the face and the hands and include collyrium, ring, bangles and dyeing of hands. We say it is the most correct explanation because there is a consensus of opinion (*ijmā'*) that it is obligatory for him who says his prayers that he should cover all those parts of the body which it is necessary to cover, and for the woman it is obligatory that she should uncover her hands and face in prayers and cover the rest of the body, except that it is reported from the Holy Prophet that he allowed the uncovering of half of her wrist. When there is a consensus of opinion on this, it follows as a matter of course that she can keep uncovered that part of the body which is not included in '*aurat*' (the part which it is necessary to cover), for it is not unlawful to uncover that which is not the '*aurat*'. And as she can keep it uncovered, it follows that this is what is meant by *illā mā ṣāhara min-hā* (IJ—C. XVIII, p. 84).