

## **Social and Individual Impacts of Veiling on Muslim Women: The Views of Mortaza Mutahhari and Qasim Amin**

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### **Abstract**

Women's Islamic covering is one of the most debated topics surrounding the issue of women in Islam towards which different discourses have taken a variety of positions. This paper will examine two distinct views of Qasim Amin (1863-1908), a male Egyptian scholar who is traditionally known as the first Muslim feminist in Arab world, and Ayatullah Mortaza Mutahhari (1903-1980), an Iranian religious scholar whose works on women-related issues are still, after a few decades, among the main sources in the study of women in Islam. This paper through analyzing the contents followed by a comparative analysis of the views of these two figures of the Islamic world reveals that recognition of Islamic covering as "a right" (haq) and "an obligation" (taklif) for Muslim women is an element that is absent in Amin's discussion of Muslim women's covering while it is a turning point in Mutahhari's discussion of the Islamic modest dress. This differentiation which is rooted in fundamentally different approaches of Mutahhari and Amin towards the concept of hijab has resulted in several disparities in their gender views. A major disparity is reflected in Mutahhari and Amin's views on veiling and women's social presence; the former considers veiling as the key to women's dynamic, legitimate and constructive social activity while the latter judges it as the main obstacle in women's activity in society.

**Key Words:** Veiling; Islamic Covering; Women's Right; Women's Social Presence; Qasim Amin; Mortaza Mutahhari.

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## Introduction

Women's Islamic covering is one of the most debated topics surrounding the issue of women in Islam towards which different discourses have taken a variety of positions. The "DOs" and "Don'ts" of this Islamic commandment provoked two extreme approaches within the larger Muslim community; one proposed by some secular Muslim feminists and the one by some traditional Muslim scholars. The former rejects women's Islamic covering while the later promotes women's seclusion and segregation. Based on the assumption that women's covering reflects the *Shari'ah's* inferior view of women and that it is a way of restricting women along the line of women's inferiority in the *Shari'ah*, secular Muslim feminists promote the abolishing of the Islamic women's covering. (See: Ahmed, 1992, Mernisi, 1988, El-Sadawi, 1988)<sup>1</sup> The traditional outlook which is greatly indebted to medieval thought upholds the view that the whole body of a woman including her face and hands should be veiled and that she should be kept at her home. A representative of this thought cited by traditional scholars is Ibn al-Jawzi (d.1200). Ibn al-Jawzi speaks of women, in his book *Kitab Ahkam al-nisa'* (book of

rulings on women), in terms of immoral seduction, shameful nakedness and indiscriminate lust. He advises that they be "imprisoned" in the house, "for like female snakes, women are expected to burrow themselves in their homes" (Al-Jawzi, 1996:73).

Within such wide spectrum of views, this paper examines an approach that does not favor the idea of women's inferiority in Islamic teachings nor the idea that promotes women's seclusion. This approach is, nonetheless, far from being consensual and universal.

This paper will examine two distinct views that generally belong to this middle approach and share similar principles while at the same time display fundamental disparities. These views belong to Qasim Amin (1863-1908) a male Egyptian scholar who is traditionally regarded as the first Muslim feminist in Arab world<sup>2</sup> and Ayatullah Mortaza Mutahhari (1903-1980) an Iranian religious scholar whose works on women related issues are still, after a few decades, among the main sources in the study of women in Islam.

The objective of this paper is to examine these two distinct views in order to eventually be able to compare them as two

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1 Nawal El Saadawi (born 1931) is an Egyptian feminist writer and activist. Fatima Mernisi (born 1941) is a Moroccan feminist writer and sociologist. Leila Ahmed (born 1940) is an Egyptian American writer on Islam and Islamic feminism. Both Sadawi and Mernisi opposed the use of veil. El Sadawi in many of her lectures used the idea of "veiling the brain". Her main argument was drawn from an account of a young relative who had been intelligent and brave until she put on the veil. After that, according to El Sadawi, it was impossible to conduct a normal discussion with her. This story was presented as an evidence of how veiling not only comes to mean covering the body, but also "veiling the brain". Mernisi, on the other hand has taken a more scientific approach to the study of veiling. She

attacks the use of veil, claiming that there is no Quranic evidence that the wearing of a veil is an Islamic obligation. Ahmed argues that veiling for women was a requirement only for the wives of the prophet.

2 Amin was the first Muslim man to write on women's issues in Egypt. Before Amin Morqus Fahmi who was a Copt wrote on women's issues and also there were texts written on women's issues by women. Margot Badran believes that Amin's books on women provoked controversy and debates because of his status as a Muslim male and a respected judge. Badran believes that: "the ideas of Fahmi, a Copt- as of women- could be more easily dismissed". For more on the roots of Muslim feminism and its prominent figures in the Arab world see: (Margot, 1995).

widely held opinions among Muslims in relation to Muslim women's covering.

The questions that this paper peruses are: How do Mutahhari and Amin define the practice of veiling as a "ruling of the *shari'ah*"? Being veiled or unveiled; which one constitutes a right for women in the view of Mutahhari and Amin? How do Mutahhari and Amin approach women's right to social presence?

I have chosen to present an overview of each of figure's views on veiling in two different sections before bringing them together in a comparative context because their similarities and differences and the significance of each do not lie on the surface and are better appreciated when the views of the two thinkers are presented as a whole and in their own context. To put it another way, the thought of each figure on veiling must be seen in context of their thought overall, and I found I was able to portray the context better in this format.

It should be clear from the outset that the terms "veiling", "hijab" (Arabic equivalent of veiling) and "women's covering (*satr*)" are used throughout the paper interchangeably for the sake of reflecting the most commonly used terminologies for this practice. However, due to different linguistic and practical implications of the terms "veiling" and "women's covering" the text will guide the reader which definition is intended; to cover the whole body including face and hands (veiling) or to cover the whole body excluding face and hands (covering).

### **1-Muslim Women's Veiling: Amin's Point of View**

The views of Amin on women's covering are primarily reflected in his *Tahrir al-Mar'ah* (*The Liberation of Women*) which was first published in 1899 during a time of visible social changes and intellectual debates in Egypt. In 1900 he furthered his argument on women's liberation by writing *Al-Mar'ah al-Jadidah* (*The New Woman*) in response to the critics of *Tahrir al-Mar'ah*. The central theme of these two books is the need for a general cultural and social transformation. It is within this theme that the arguments regarding women and more particularly about women's covering are embedded.

These books at the same time reflect a development in gender thoughts of Amin. In the first book (*Tahrir al-Mar'ah*), he is very cautious not to distance himself from prevailing religious outlook while in the second (*Al-Mar'ah al-Jadidah*) he is not hesitant to reveal his pro-Western liberal views. His approach in the former is close to 'Abdu's while in the latter he is more inclined towards the views of European women movements.<sup>1</sup>

From Amin's point of view, changing customs regarding women and changing their costumes, abolishing the veil in particular, were keys to bring about the desired social changes. In his book, Amin advocated substantial reforms for women such as obligatory education for girls and reforming the laws of polygamy and divorce. However, his main emphasis remained with the issue of abolishing the veil within the context of his advocacy for fundamental changes in culture and society that he thought were essential for Egyptians in

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1. See more on developments of Amin's gender thoughts reflected in his books in: (Yasin, 1998:143-150) and also in: (Abu-Hamdan, 1992)

particular and for Muslim nations worldwide.

The impact of Amin's opposition towards *hijab* was not limited to Egypt's borders and, as Rasoul Jafarian argues, was one of the routes through which the idea of the removal of *hijab* (*kashf-i hijab*) found its way to Iran (Jafarian, 2001).

In his book, Amin discusses veiling and its impacts on women's personal and communal lives and on society as a whole. On the personal level he argues that women's veiling deprives them of their God-given opportunity to enjoy the benefits of the world. He maintains that God wants the human being, man and woman alike, to administer this world and to enjoy its bounties and benefits and that God has not divided the universe in a way that one part is for women to enjoy and the other part for men. Amin argues that God created the burdens and pleasures of the world to be shared by men and women on the path of which women's veiling is an obstacle. He states that:

"How can a woman enjoy all the pleasures, feelings, and power that God created for her and how can she work in the universe if she is banned from the sight of any man except a blood relative or some other men to whom she cannot be married according to Islamic law. Undoubtedly this is not what *shari'ah* [Islamic law] wants, and it should not be allowed by either law or reason (Amin 1995:40)".

Emphasizing another personal impact of veiling on women's lives, he further argues that veiling is contradictory to the fact that Islamic law has made both women and men equally responsible for the civil and criminal consequences of their actions and also to the fact that Islam has given them both the right to administer their finances. The contradiction is due to the difficulty concerning the identification of a veiled

woman in financial and judiciary procedures. He states that:

"It is a very peculiar and difficult thing to prove the identity of a woman who is present but totally covered from head to foot or concealed behind a curtain or door...How many times do we learn that a woman has been married without her knowledge, or that she has leased her property without being aware of it or she may even have been dispossessed of all that she owns and is ignorant of it?" (Ibid)

While the consequences of veiling at the personal level of women's lives have been brought up by Amin in his case for abolishing veiling, he mainly focuses on the consequences of veiling in the communal level of women's lives and its impact on society as a whole. He views veiling as one of the most important issues influencing the affairs of the country. To understand why Amin found women's veiling to have so much influence on social life of Muslim communities, we need to have a glimpse at the Egyptian society which Amin used as his case study and then generalized the result to other Muslim nations as well.

Amin wrote his famous book in 1899, years after the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, when as a result of economic, social, political, and administrative consequences of colonial power some classes were benefited including the European residents of Egypt, the Egyptian upper class, the new middle class of rural notables, and men educated in Western-type secular schools who became the civil servants and new intellectual elites. These new modern men, whether trained in the West or in the Western institutions in Egypt, used their new knowledge to replace the traditionally and religiously trained civil servants and elites. As a result of such replacements, and in light of the colorful and attractive prospect of Western approaches and lifestyles, the

Islamic and traditional elements of society were regarded as antiquated and sources of the nation's backwardness that must be discarded. This approach was further enforced by some influential colonial figures such as Lord Cromer<sup>1</sup> and also by the Christian missionaries. (Ahmed, 1992:150-154).

This type of approach received different reactions among Egyptian scholars. There were those who advocated the adoption of a "European outlook". This reaction was promoted by a group that founded the pro-British daily *al-Muqattam*. At the other extreme was a group whose views were reflected in the newspaper *al-Mu'ayyed*. They opposed Western influence in any form. At the same time, there emerged a third view that promoted the acquisition of Western technology and knowledge and simultaneously the revivification and reform of the Islamic heritage, including reform in areas affecting women. Muhammad 'Abdu and his *Umma* party, which emerged as a dominant political party in the first decades of the twentieth century, advocated this third approach. (Ibid: 148)

Amin's *Tahrir al-Mar'ah* was a product of this last outlook. Similar to 'Abdu, Amin believed that Muslim societies were in need of a drastic social reform in their traditional heritage and that a nation's tradition plays an immense role in its prosperity or misery. (Ibid: 5-6; Amin, 1995).

Reforming the traditions affecting women such as their veiling practice were the place to start the social, cultural, and intellectual reform of a Muslim nation, in the view of Amin, as he regarded women's status in a nation as the mirror that reflects

the moral standards of that nation. He states that:

"This is the basis of our observations. This evidence of the history confirms and demonstrates that the status of women is inseparably tied to the status of a nation. When the status of a nation is low, reflecting an uncivilized condition for that nation, the status of women is also low, and when the condition of a nation is elevated, reflecting the progress and civilization of that nation, the status of women in that country is elevated." (Ibid: 6)

It has so far been clear that, unlike secular Muslim feminists like Nawal El Sadawi, Fatima Mernisi, and Leila Ahmed who blamed both Islam and the prevailing traditions among nations for Muslim society's misfortune in general and for women's in particular, Amin mainly blames the society's traditions and customs for afflicting a low status on women. He even goes as far as to criticize those who associate the higher status of Western women with their Christianity and calls this idea inaccurate because, in his view, Christianity did not set up a system, which guaranteed women's freedom and rights. He, at the same time, elaborates on the status of women in Islam and states that:

"The Islamic legal system, the *shari'ah*, stipulated the equality of women and men before any other legal system. Islam declared women's freedom and emancipation, and granted women all human rights during a time when women occupied the lowest status in all societies." (Ibid: 7)

Amin, therefore, insists that it is not the *shari'ah* that has imposed extreme veiling on women. It is rather the traditional customs to be blamed for afflicting such hardship and misery on women and on society alike.

1. Lord Cromer (1841-1917) was in charge of Britain's occupation of Egypt. He had established a

reputation for himself as an expert in the government of what he called "Eastern people".

He dedicates a major part of his argument against women's veiling to stress the significance of women's education and intellectual development assuming that veiling does necessarily prevent these qualities from flourishing. Amin argues that while the revealed law of God indicates that women, like men, are endowed with minds and intellect, history has left them behind without nurturing their minds through any proper training. This has resulted in the weakening of women's rational and intellectual power.

Amin calls on Muslims to reflect on this situation and realize that exempting women from their first responsibility, namely their preparation for self-sufficiency, has caused them to lose their rights and consequently affected the wellbeing of the society as a whole. The first step towards women's emancipation is, therefore, to provide them with the means of self-sufficiency, which only happens through education. Veiling, which is in the view of Amin, best defined as a traditional practice that denies women their basic rights to education, active social participation, and intellectual life must be necessarily abolished as the prime obstacle in this path. Having such characteristics, veiling denies, in the view of Amin, a country the abilities of half of its population and leads a large number of citizens to be mere consumers of others' production and to live only through the efforts of others. Such intellectually deprived individuals; namely, veiled women are not more than "silent machines or dumb beasts who work but do not understand" (Ibid: 56) even if they enter the work force in the society. Amin also doubts the productivity of veiled women's role within the peripheries of their homes as he believes that women who are deprived of education and intellectual development due, in the view of Amin, to the culture of veiling

are not able to raise their children in a way that is eventually beneficial to their societies.

It should be noted, however, that education in Amin's view is not just the simple process of retaining a certain amount of knowledge required by school programs, sitting for examinations, and receiving a certificate or diploma. It should rather develop much further than that and become a continuous process in which one searches for perfection in many different forms. Therefore, any action or behavior that prevents one from acquiring perfection at any age level should be regarded as an obstacle in the path of one's education and should be discredited. Veiling, as Amin judges, is to be discredited as it prevents women from acquiring perfection by compromising her physical and mental health resulting from being isolated at home and also by preventing her interaction with other people.

Amin, however, warns that his opposition to the traditional veiling of Muslim women should not be judged as his opposition to veiling as an Islamic practice being promoted and obligated by the *Shari'ah*:

"An observer might think that I now maintain the veil should be completely dispensed with but this is not the case. I still defend the use of the veil and consider it one of the permanent cornerstones of morality. I would recommend, however, that we adhere to its use according to Islamic law, which differs from our present popular traditions." (Ibid: 35)

As a matter of fact he criticizes Muslims for going too far in veiling their women and prohibiting them from appearing unveiled before men to the extent that they have turned women into objects or goods that men own. He equally criticizes Westerners for going too far in the exposure of their women so that it is difficult for a Western woman to

guard herself from "sensuous desires and unacceptable shameful feelings". (Ibid: 75)

Anticipating the reaction from traditional and religious circles, he reaffirms his allegiance to the rules of the *shari'ah* and clarifies that:

"Had the *shari'ah* included specific passages to advocate the use of the veil as it is known among Muslims, I would not have written a single word contrary to those writings, however harmful they might have initially appeared, because heavenly orders should be obeyed without question, research, or discussion. However, the *shari'ah* does not stipulate the use of the veil in this manner." (Ibid: 37)

Although there are occasions, like in above statement, in which Amin maintains that his position against traditional veiling does not mean that he rejects women's obligatory covering in Islam he, however, seems to be reluctant and hesitant to actually recommend any concrete form of Islamic covering.

Without engaging himself in much discussion over the features and characteristics of veiling that the *shari'ah* might promote, Amin takes a cautious stand; while he acknowledges a kind of *shari'ah*-ruled veiling in order not to provoke reactions from his religious audience he does not seem to be recommending it either because he does not seem to be convinced that Islamic covering benefits Muslim women and their nations. He regards women's modesty as "the most beautiful quality a woman possesses" (Ibid) but this modesty does not necessarily come with covering. Amin instead lays emphasis on preventing men and women from being alone together as a means of ensuring that men and women have relations only through their legitimate bonds.

Amin further argues that veiling does not necessarily guarantee the modesty of a

woman. He is rather convinced that what would guarantee women's purity and chastity is their liberation and freedom. He, in this regard, views American women of his time as those enjoying more freedom than any other woman on earth, whilst guarding their honor and having high moral standards. Amin's generalized approach towards American women, though without any supportive data or documentation, is expected to prove that men and women who freely and regularly meet and interact with the opposite sex are less likely to act immorally. (Ibid: 51)

Finally, while Amin does not blame Islam for miseries of Muslim women and, even further, acknowledges that Islam has initiated encouraging changes to the lives of women, he is, at the same time, hesitant to discuss and recommend the *shari'ah*-regulated hijab. The roots and implications of Amin's position will be discussed later in this paper.

## **2-Islamic Modest Dress: Mutahhari's Perspective**

Some fifty years later in another part of the Islamic world, in *Shi'i* Iran, Ayatollah Mortaza Mutahhari launches an unprecedented scholarly defense of the Islamic modest dress.

Mutahhari's discussion on Islamic covering is part of his larger objective of defending Islamic principles in the face of growing attacks on Islam in the name of modern values. His target audience in the discussion of Islamic modest dress, which was first addressed in a series of lectures for the Islamic Association of Physicians in 1967 and has been subsequently published under the title *Mas'aleh-i Hijab*, was Iranian Muslim youth who were heavily exposed to different currents of thoughts such as materialism and eclecticism (*iltiqat*). (See

more on social and political circumstances of Iran in Mutahhari's time in: Martin, 2000). Impressed by the positive feedbacks he received from the readers of this book in an introduction to the second edition, Mutahhari elaborates on his objectives of discussing "Islamic covering" and also on his target audience in the discussion of the Islamic modest dress:

"The objective of the writer and also the objective of intellectual and religiously committed members of the Islamic Association of Physicians in discussing, analyzing, and publishing *Mas'aleh-i Hijab* is that in addition to many practical deviations that have occurred in relation to "covering" this issue and other issues related to women have turned into instruments in hands of some filthy and stooge-like people to make noisy propaganda against the religion of Islam. It is therefore evident that in such circumstances the youth who are not sufficiently enlightened in religious matters can easily become the victims of this propaganda." (Mutahhari, 1978: 13)

Mutahhari approaches the subject of women's covering from a different perspective. Instead of asking if women benefit from their being covered or not, Mutahhari asks another equally important question of: whether all men are allowed to visually enjoy any women they wish and wherever they wish. (Ibid, 82)

Islam's answer to this question is obviously negative; a man is allowed to look at a woman's uncovered body for pleasure only under legal circumstances provided by marriage. Beyond that, any kind of enjoyment from women is not allowed for men. On the other hand, woman's responsibility is to not let men other than her legitimate partner take pleasure from her, and this can be mainly provided through proper covering of her body.

The issue of Islamic covering in Mutahhari's view should be, thus, discussed in light of this dichotomy; limiting any sort

of sexual pleasures including visual to marital relations in the family or no restriction and no regulated covering so all men and women can enjoy each other in the society. It can be, therefore, argued that the whole concept of Islamic covering in the thought of Mutahhari should be viewed as a means of setting borders for what is allowed in the family and not allowed in a society in order to protect both family and society from malfunction and destruction.

As a matter of fact, Mutahhari not only recommends Islamic modest dress as a religious requirement, making reference to the different physical and psychological characteristics of men and women, he also recommends it as an efficient tool to help both women and men preserve their modesty. In other words, he believes that modest dress has been obligated by the *shari'ah* solely as a means of preserving moral values in society and to help family relations become strong. In this regard, Mutahhari categorically denies the allegations that Islamic covering is a sign of Islam's inferior approach towards women and that it is a means of refraining and segregating women. (See: Ibid, 29-76)

One of the key elements in Mutahhari's discussion on Muslim women's covering is his cautious and diligent attempt to distance the Islamic practice of "covering" from "veiling". Mutahhari is well aware of the implications of veiling (*hijab*) for Muslim women and thus lays a great emphasis on introducing an authentic alternative to veiling.

He believes that the term "veiling", which is now predominantly used to refer to women's coverings, is the best translation of the term "*hijab*" in Arabic. Various Arabic texts in classical and medieval Islam used this term in relation to something that hides, disguises, segregates, or secludes. In this

regard, he examines some of the most important Arabic texts in order to see how they applied this term. For instance, the Quran has used the word *hijab* to describe the setting of the sun, because with its setting, the sun hides from our eyes. In another example, he refers to the words of Imam 'Ali,<sup>2</sup> in which he advises one of his governors not to prolong his seclusion from his people. (Salih, 1977:441) A very familiar use of the term *hijab* is "*al-hijab al-hajiz*" or diaphragm that separates the chest from the abdomen. He make it clear that the term *hijab* (veiling) in Arabic is associated with separation, hiding, and seclusion.

Nevertheless Mutahhari concludes that this word has never been used in Islamic jurisprudence in relation to Muslim women's coverings. The term that has been used instead is the word "*satr*" or covering. "*Satr*" in relation to women's clothing, is defined as covering certain areas of the body in the presence of a non-*mahram* male,<sup>3</sup> whereas, the use of veiling conveys the idea of a woman being placed behind a curtain because, as was mentioned, *hijab* is the word for separation, segregation and seclusion.

The use of these two terms in Islam's legal sources should therefore be viewed as a key point in understanding Islam's position on women's covering. If Islam wants its female followers to be secluded in their homes or to be completely covered even when they go out in case of necessity, the term veiling or *hijab* would be the appropriate term to use. On the other hand, if Muslim women are required to cover themselves in a way that their mobility and active participation in society is not compromised and they do not have to hide

themselves in their homes or conceal themselves behind veils, the word "*satr*" or covering is the right term to apply. Mutahhari is well aware of the implications of each word for Muslim women. Thus, he argues that the latter meaning of *hijab*; namely, *satr* is the one promoted and encouraged by the teachings of Islam.

In the Quran, as the most important source of the *shari'ah*, there are two verses that are commonly known as referring to ordinary Muslim women's clothing in which the notion of "*hijab*" is absent. These verses, according to Mutahhari, do not have any explicit or implicit indication of veiling, which is the total concealment of women's physical features. The only verses of the Quran that address ordinary Muslim women's covering read as follow:

"And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex; and that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments. And O ye Believers! Turn ye all together towards Allah, that ye may attain Bliss. (24:31)

O Prophet! Tell thy wives and daughters, and the believing women, that they should cast their outer garments over their persons (when abroad): that is most convenient, that they should be known (as such) and not molested. And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful." (33:59)

2. First Imam in Shi'ah tradition, who is known as an author in 'Arabic language. His book which is called *nahj al-balaghah* ( the ocean of elequency) is a sophisticated 'Arabic text

3. One with whom marriage is prohibited (usually because of kinship).

Mutahhari believes that the contents of these two verses do not suggest that ordinary Muslim women should veil themselves and that veiling was a requirement only for the Prophet's wives.

Despite the obvious absence of such a notion with regards to women's clothing in the two verses of the Quran that deal with this subject, one may wonder how the idea of veiling found its way into Muslim thought and became known among some Muslim factions as "the authentic Islamic modest dress". Mutahhari identifies a partial answer to this question in the verse 33:53 which reads as follows: "And when you ask them (the Prophet's wives) for something ask them from behind a veil (*hijab*)..." This is the only verse in the Quran that relates veiling with women, but, as Mutahhari points out, this commandment is historically confined to the Prophet's wives and does not have anything to do with the ordinary Muslim women. (See: Tabatabaie, 1981: 528). Given the attitude that they had towards female gender, some Quranic commentators, especially in the late classical and early medieval periods thought that since the Prophet's wives were veiled, it should be even more appropriate for ordinary Muslim women to follow suit. Nevertheless, they ignored the fact that the Prophet's wives' veiling was not a matter of modesty; it was rather a matter of giving them dignity through special status.

Mutahhari, however, believes that this was not the only purpose behind the Quran's requirement for the prophet's wives:

"The prophet's wives who are considered as "mothers of believers" and enjoy great respect among Muslims, were the subject of such severe and emphatic commands of the Quran because it was possible that they become political and social tool for selfish and ambitious men, therefore the Quran [in

33:33] orders them to remain in their houses." (Ibid: 9; Mutahhari, 1977)

In the midst of extreme views on Muslim women's covering, Mutahhari upholds a distinct approach that respects Islamic modest dress as an obligation, while still emphasizing the preservation of women's dignity and rights. He believes that the proper and required clothing for women, as is outlined in the Quran and is further clarified and elaborated in the sayings and actions of the Prophet himself and explained in the *hadith*, contributes to the health of society, in terms of modesty and morality. According to this approach, Islamic modest dress is part of Islam's plan to strengthen the marital relations among husbands and wives, by preventing, or at least reducing, the possibilities of any kind of willing or unwilling seductive behavior through clothing.

This job however can be accomplished neither by men nor by women alone. This is a fact that is clearly stated in the Quran where prior to putting the burden of Islamic modest dress on women, it states that believing men must be modest in their clothing, behavior and actions as well. However, as the verse continues it gives women a further responsibility and that is to cover their bosoms and not to reveal their attractions. This extra burden for women is believed to be the result of the physical features of female body that naturally have more potential attraction for the opposite sex than does the male body.

Mutahhari's further contribution to the issue of Islamic modest dress is his argument that Islam by not requiring women to cover their hands and face has in fact sent the message that, given the limits set by the *shari'ah*, women are allowed to have public presence and social interaction. Mutahhari believes that this perception can be clearly

inferred from the verse (24:31) where it clarifies those women should not reveal their attractions and adornments but it does not ask women to undergo a harsh and difficult burden of covering the parts which are naturally revealed.

Describing specific features of Islamic modest dress Mutahhari presents yet another novel approach towards this divine practice; he valorizes the Islamic modest dress as the most essential element of the female Muslim identity and as one of pre-conditions for her presence in society. Muslim women's covering, therefore, not only does not prevent women's social participation, it is in fact the route to their secure social presence.

The Islamic modest dress is, therefore, best defined by Mutahhari as a kind of clothing that covers all of the body except for the face and hands so that a woman's movements and activities will not be disturbed. Different models of clothing in the Muslim world are often associated with traditional and cultural trends, rather than being recommended specifically by Islam. The principle is to cover the body and its attractions while other elements of dress, including color, shape or style, should be left up to individual choices.

### **3-Comparative Analysis of the two Approaches**

Comparative examination of views of the two figures of the Islamic world reveals fundamental similarities in their gender views among which are; their common concern about women's issues, their emphasis over woman's human value in the *Shari'ah*, and more importantly their emphasis on women's role in the flourishing of human societies. These parallel elements have introduced another significant similarity which is the negation of women's

segregation and seclusion by both Mutahhari and Amin.

These similarities, however significant, do not conceal major differences between Mutahhari and Amin's views on women. The differences are reflected in their different motivations in approaching and addressing Muslim women's veiling and in profound disparity in their basic outlook towards the notion of Islamic code of women's covering.

### **3-1-Dissimilar Motivation**

Women's issues in general and women's covering in particular are not primary concerns of either Mutahhari or Amin. While this in itself marks another parallel element in their discussion on women, different motivation in following the issue of women's covering marks a defining dissimilarity in the views of these figures.

Amin is greatly concerned with the nation's backwardness and it is in fact in his search for the causes of this backwardness that he comes across women's issues. Among the potential roots of the nation's wretchedness Amin's sole emphasis is on women's position. He believes that women's situation and state in a nation shapes the whole nation's fate because women as mothers and wives are, in the view of Amin, the builders and sustainers of the society's culture. He concludes that if women are not well brought up and lack intellectual and cultural maturity, the nation should not be expected to rise to a prosperous and developed entity.

It is not therefore a far-fetched judgment that Amin's involvement with women's issues cannot be regarded as an attempt for the sake of women's right despite his being widely known as the first Arab feminist. He can be more accurately identified as a social activist and a commentator who advocates

reform and development in the affairs of the nation. In other words, women's issues become his immediate concern not because he is an advocate of women's right but simply because; first, he finds the role that women naturally play in the upbringing of the children of the nation very significant; and second, admired by development of the West, Amin borrows an already practiced model in Western countries to develop his ideal image of women's position in society as well as in family. He on the one hand has full confidence in the West's competence in all areas of human's life and on the other in Muslim countries' inefficiency. He admires the West's achievements in different areas of technology and science as well as in social and individual life while he doubts the ability of Muslim countries to rise from their unfavorable circumstances unless they follow the path that the West has taken.

In the view of Amin, treatment of women's issues by the West is not an exception to the West's success story. Therefore if Muslim countries were to develop and progress they should discard their backward traditions in relation to women and follow the West in that aspect as well as in others. He believes that the West not only has attained considerable technological and scientific goals it has also achieved "the highest levels of education and upbringing" compared to Islamic Civilization which is nowhere close to Western Civilization in its achievements, as Amin believes. This judgment by Amin makes the West eligible to be followed by Muslims both in technological-scientific arena as well as in social and cultural realm including women's issue. Amin's position towards women's issues is clearly based on the idea of Muslims' incompetence to address such issue and his sole solution is to follow the Western model that he thinks it

has proven to be competent.

He therefore becomes involved in women's issues because he views women's miserable condition in Egypt and other Muslim countries the root cause of the nations' misery and backwardness. To be good mothers and wives women should be educated and be socially brought up in a way that they can freely interact with men. Veiling, in the view of Amin, restricts free interaction between man and woman and, thus, prevents women from being efficiently educated and, thus, from being socially and intellectually competent. This suffices Amin to reject "veiling" altogether as the obstacle in the way of development of the nation.

Amin's rejection of veiling can be defined as a kind of functionalistic approach towards women and their veiling; veil prevents women from worthwhile undertaking of their functions in family and in society towards development of the nation and it should therefore be abolished. Such approach to veiling poses three major issues: First, it undermines the *shari'ah's* ruling on hijab. Second, it undermines individual and religious right of Muslim women to choose to be veiled. Third, it erases the problem instead of solving it. To be more explicit, instead of finding ways to a dynamic and practical Islamic dress code for women that; complies with the *shari'ah*; respects women's right of choosing to be veiled; and does not compensate their free mobility and presence in the society, this approach tends to abolish veiling altogether.

Mutahhari's approach towards women's issues is similar to Amin's in it's not being gender motivated. Mutahhari discusses women's issues not because he is specifically concerned with "women's rights" as a gender issue but his aim was to defend the Islamic teachings and laws in the face of current gender awareness and

feminist critiques that insisted on gender equality on the one hand and on Islam's inferior view towards women on the other. As the reformers introduced new civil laws aimed, in their view, at securing more rights for women, Mutahhari was compelled to demonstrate that it was actually Islam that offered the most "rights" (*huquq*) for women. His aim was to define Islamic laws on women including civil laws and the laws on covering in order to present Islam as woman-positive and to prove, as he himself puts it, that Islam, as the seal of religions, not only does not downgrade women's human values it does rather present the best answer to all humanity's needs and questions among which are women's issues.

Although Mutahhari was genuinely concerned about women and recognized to some degree that they had been oppressed, just as Amin did, those impulses were subordinate to his desire to defend Islamic laws and teachings.

### **3-2-Dissimilar Explanations of Hijab**

It has become so far clear that Amin opposes *hijab* while Mutahhari encourages it. It is, however, worth emphasizing that the *hijab* that is encouraged by Mutahhari is not the same as the *hijab* rejected by Amin; Amin rejects the *hijab* that segregates, secludes and infringes women's right to a dignified and dynamic individual and social life while Mutahhari encourages the *hijab* that reflects a totally different picture with different objectives. The subjects of Mutahhari's approval and Amin's rejection are not identical while interestingly enough the subject of their rejection is identical; Mutahhari does, similar to Amin, reject the kind of *hijab* that leads to women's segregation and seclusion. In other words, Mutahhari's discussion of *hijab* sets a clear border as to what is accepted and what is not.

In his view, *hijab* is only meant to regulate man and woman's mode of presence in society in terms of both their covering and their behavior. He is also very explicit as to what *hijab* is not meant to be and that is exactly the point where Mutahhari and Amin's discussion of *hijab* converge; *hijab* is not meant to imprison women within the peripheries of their homes and to exclude them from a dynamic social presence.

This marks a methodological yet very fundamental dissimilarity between Mutahhari and Amin's argument. Mutahhari develops a theory of *hijab* based on rational (*aqli*) and transmitted (*naqli*) argumentation in which it is clear what the Islamic *hijab* is, what the Islamic *hijab* is not, why the *shari'ah* regulated the *hijab*, what are the objective of Islamic *hijab*, and who benefits and who loses from this Islamic creed. Amin, on the other hand, argues, based solely on his social observation, that *hijab* is the cause of the nation's miseries and thus it should, logically, be abolished because obviously no one wants their nation's misery. In his observation, unlike Mutahhari, he limits himself to only one definition of *hijab* and based on that sole definition he makes a general conclusion against *hijab* in its general sense, not excluding the *shari'ah*-decreed *hijab*. In other words, in Amin's discussion of *hijab* only one account of *hijab* is present and that is the one promoting women's segregation and inferiority.

These are not just two strategies taken by Mutahhari and Amin in dealing with *hijab*. They are rather two distinct approaches towards *hijab* with different implications and outcomes in the discussion of *hijab*.

### **4- Conclusion**

A comparative study of different views of different parties on a common issue is

expected to provide an efficient understating of the views of the parties involved, their fundamental and structural differences as well as similarities, and also their weak and strong points in relation to the issue in question. Moreover, such comparative study is more importantly expected to address the implications and outcomes of the views. In this paper the views of Mutahhari and Amin in relation to hijab as well as their similar and dissimilar positions on the issue were discussed. The concluding section will address the implications and outcomes of Mutahhari and Amin's discussion of hijab

#### **4-1- Hijab: an Islamic Obligation and a Heavenly Order**

Mutahhari views Islamic covering first and foremost, as an Islamic obligation but this acknowledgement does not deter him from discussing the nature of Islamic covering, its objectives, benefits and of course the misrepresentations of this practice among Muslims. Mutahhari views Islam's position on women, including women's covering, as part of "Islam's white revolution for women" that by taking women's physical and psychological characteristics into consideration allows women and men to move freely in their own orbits<sup>4</sup> without superiority of one to the other. He calls this revolution white because it does not encourage women to be suspicious and disrespectful of their male counterparts and to rebel against them, as he believes that women's movement in the West would promote. (Mutahhari, 1977:90)

Acknowledging the manifold nature of the Islamic obligation of *hijab*, which he believes it impacts individuals and societies alike, Mutahhari makes a rational argument

and concludes that this practice conforms to the laws of nature reflected in man and woman's gender qualifications, and thus to the laws of the *shari'ah*.

Amin, on the other hand, is mainly focused on a particular interpretation of Islamic covering i.e., extreme veiling and vehemently opposes it. He cautiously acknowledges that Muslim women's covering is based on the *shari'ah* and admits it only on the ground that it is "a heavenly order" and that such orders should not be violated. This hesitant affirmation of the Islamic covering has in fact resulted in Amin's overlooking of the benefits of Islamic modest dress for individual women and for societies. Moreover, by his silence in introducing and defining an Islamic covering for women with no damaging impacts of extreme veiling, such as the one defined by Mutahhari, Amin has in fact deemed this dynamic Islamic obligation non-feasible and non-essential.

#### **4-2- Hijab: Right and/or Responsibility**

As discussed earlier, Mutahhari begins his discussion of *hijab* by asking the important question of whether men have the right to visually enjoy women as they like. This question is important because it concerns men's gaze and the effect it has on women's space and psychological security and dignity in the public sphere. Expanding on Islam's response to this question, Mutahhari believes that a woman has the right to prevent men, other than her legitimate partner, from looking at her uncovered body for pleasure. This is, at the same time, women's responsibility, according to Mutahhari, to not let men other than her legitimate partner take pleasure from her.

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4. Refers to this verse: "The sun dares not overtake the moon nor does night outpace the day each floats along in its own orbit" (36:40).

Right and responsibility are, in this context, two sides of the same coin and can only be realized through proper covering of woman's body.

This presentation of Islamic modest dress marks a very progressive achievement by Mutahhari; while he acknowledges the divine origin of this Islamic creed he recognizes it as women's right. The Islamic covering is, therefore, in the view of Mutahhari an obligation (*taklif*) and a right (*haq*) for women that, while it promotes modesty in the society, provides them with the possibility of a constructive and undisturbed public, social and intellectual participation. By so doing, Mutahhari has demonstrated his attentiveness towards causes that Muslim feminists have been fighting for such as: Muslim women's rights, liberty and freedom, in the framework of the *shari'ah* of course.

Mutahhari's discussion on Islamic covering is therefore significant and innovative on the ground that it views this practice as a right for women; their right of religious commitment and their right to not allow unlawful pleasure-seeking behaviors of men.

The notion of "hijab as a right for women" is absolutely absent in Amin's work. He rather views hijab as being detrimental to women's education, liberty and freedom of movement. Amin, by not differentiating between the *hijab* that damages women and the nation and the *hijab* that benefits both, makes Muslim women's adoption of Islamic covering look a backward choice. This position of Amin not only results in alienation of Muslim women who willingly insist on maintaining their Islamic covering it also naturally results in ignoring the right of women to be veiled.

*Kashf-i hijab* or the forceful removing of hijab in Iran under the rule of Reza Shah

Pahlavi, which is a clear instance of violating women's right of being veiled, was, as Rasoul Jafarian argues, formed on the basis of several elements among which was Amin's advocacy of abolishing the veil in Muslim nations. (Jafarian, 2001)

### **4-3- Hijab and Western-Style Women's Liberty**

As has been so far clear, women's liberation and their discarding traditional values for the sake of modern values are Amin's prescription for the desired establishment of a modern society like that in the West. In regard with Amin's admiration for the West's culture of undisturbed gender interaction, this present research does not intend to investigate women's situation in the West and the moral standards in that context but it does raise the following concerns: first, Amin as a Muslim scholar has failed to differentiate between the concept of women's liberty and emancipation promoted in the West and in Islam; second, by his vision of the West's absolute ability to provide solution to every problem of the nation Amin has ignored the capacities of Islamic teachings in solving women's issues.

Amin, like 'Abduh sensed the need to reform the nation's traditional culture but unlike 'Abduh, as argued by Charles D. Smith: "looked more readily to European [Western] thought than to Islamic for solution for the problems he believed were obstacle to Egypt modernization" (Smith, 1983: 26). This, however, needs Amin's explanation as he, in theory, acknowledges that Islam has progressive views on women and on gender issues but in practice he only credits the West's civilization and its achievements for solving issues of Muslim women and Muslim nations.

Unlike Amin, Mutahhari does not view modern gender values of the West as models

to be promoted among Muslim nations and certainly does not see any prospect of prosperity for women in following Western gender ideology. This does not mean, by any means, that Mutahhari disregards modern gender concerns. He is rather critical of the Western gender ideology as he believes that it has not taken man and woman's gender differences seriously or that it has even ignored them in the name of gender equality. Mutahhari affirms a woman-positive, progressive face of Islam, condemning "irrational" traditionalism and stubborn conservatism (*jumud-i fikri*) that would, out of fear of novelty and innovation, deny basic and fundamental rights to women such as education and a social presence. But he also rejects the "ignorance" that would throw away everything and imitate the West, in wanton disregard of the religious and cultural values of Muslim societies.

In Mutahhari's view, promoting unrestricted, Western-style gender relations, mixing gender roles that should be distinct, and rejecting the veil (Islamic covering) and gendered laws of the *Shari'ah* in the name of women's liberty and equality are misunderstandings of how Islam accommodates, as he believes it does, historical and social evolution. The error of those who would take this approach, he believes, lies in imagining that because Western technological and scientific advancement is to be admired and followed (something he believes himself), so should Western gender culture also be followed. There is no clear indication of whether Mutahhari actually meant to address Amin's argument, although it is historically possible, he obviously has reacted to this kind of approach, like that of Amin, that credits the West for its achievements in women's issues exactly on the same ground that it credits the West's science and technology

achievements. Amin trusts the West in solving women's issues because the West has proven to be accountable in science and technology. This is exactly what Mutahhari objects to and suggests a selective, rather than submissive, approach towards the West's achievements.

In conclusion what is worth further reflection is the approach of Mutahhari and Amin, as two Muslim scholars, towards solving a problem with strong religious and national identity elements. Mutahhari addresses the problem using religious and national capacities from within the Muslim society while Amin distrusts the internal elements and relies on solutions from without.

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## تأثیرات اجتماعی و فردی حجاب بر زنان مسلمان: مقایسه دیدگاه‌های

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حجاب زن مسلمان از جمله موضوعات بحث برانگیز در خصوص موضوع زن در اسلام است که در این ارتباط جریان‌های مختلف موضع‌گیری‌های متفاوتی داشته‌اند. این مقاله بر آن است تا دیدگاه‌های دو متفکر صاحب نظر در این حوزه یعنی قاسم امین که از او به عنوان اولین فمینیست مسلمان یاد می‌شود و مرتضی مطهری که آثارش در باب مسئله زن پس از گذشت چند دهه همچنان از منابع مهم تحقیق در حوزه مطالعه زن در اسلام به شمار می‌رود را مقایسه کند.

این مقاله با روش تحلیل محتوا دیدگاه‌های مطهری و امین را به صورت مقایسه‌ای بررسی می‌کند. یکی از تفاوت‌های کلیدی این دو دیدگاه که در این مقاله مورد بحث قرار می‌گیرد عبارت است از اینکه در تفکر مطهری حجاب اسلامی "حق" و در عین حال "تکلیف" زن مسلمان می‌باشد. این دو ویژگی مبنای بحث مطهری است در حالی که در دیدگاه امین جایی ندارد. این تفاوت بنیادین در نگاه به مسئله حجاب منجر به تفاوت‌های اساسی در دیدگاه‌های آن دو در بحث جنسیت و خصوصاً در بحث حضور اجتماعی زن شده است: مطهری حجاب را کلید حضور فعال و سازنده زن در اجتماع می‌داند؛ در حالی که امین آن را مانع اصلی حضور زن در اجتماع می‌شمارد.

واژگان کلیدی: حجاب، پوشش اسلامی، حقوق زنان، حضور اجتماعی زن، قاسم امین، مرتضی مطهری.

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