



The Western Beauty Myth

Shabaat of Hizb ut-Tahrir

21st Dhul Hijjah 1423 Hijri
(22nd February 2003 CE)

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Contents

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Translation of the Qur'an

It should be clear that the Qur'an is only authentic in its original language, Arabic. Since perfect translation of the Qur'an is impossible, we have used the translation of the meaning of the Qur'an throughout the book.

Qur'anic *ayat* and transliterated words have been *italicised*.

Ahadith appear in **bold**.

سُبْحَانَكَ - subhanahu wa ta'ala
سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكَ - sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam
رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا/عَنْهُ - radhi allaho anha/anho
AH - After Hijrah
CE - Christian Era

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In December 2002, London hosted the 52nd annual Miss World Beauty Contest. Originally scheduled to be held in Nigeria, it had to be moved following the response of the Muslims of Nigeria, who took to the streets to demonstrate against such a show that allows a group of loosely clad women to reveal their bodies in public. Ironically, this year's contest was won by the only Muslim contestant in the competition, Miss Turkey. After winning the contest, Azra Akin, or 'Miss Turkey' made the following statement; "I hope I will represent the women of the world in a good way. I am very honoured to be Miss World, I think it is good for a woman to have this position, and I hope I can make a difference."

Despite Azra's view upon the subject, many women throughout the world, both Muslim and non-Muslim, do not regard such beauty contests as bringing honour to the woman. Instead it degrades her status and reduces her to being an object of man's desire. However, if we examine the concept of the perfect image that a woman should aspire to attain and the description of 'What constitutes beauty', held by Azra and the other contestants, sadly, they would be shared globally by many women, non-Muslim and Muslim alike.

In today's reality, the dominant international view that is propagated of what constitutes 'The Beautiful Woman' is that which was initially defined by the Western Capitalist nations. A woman that is tall, slim, and fair. In addition to this, the prevalent global view of the perfect image that a woman should aspire to attain is mirrored upon the appearance and dress of the Western woman.

It is important to understand that the image that a woman aspires to attain represents much more than how she wishes to present herself to the world physically. It represents the identity of how she views life and

of how she wishes to live her life. Naomi Wolf in her book, 'The Beauty Myth', writes, "The qualities that a given period calls beautiful in women are merely symbols of the female behaviour that that period considers desirable: The beauty myth is always actually prescribing behaviour and not appearance".

So what is the identity that the image of the Western secular woman is based upon? It is built upon the idea that the woman should be free to define for herself all aspects of her life from her own mind and her own desires, from her appearance, her dress code, her relationships with men, to the roles that she should adopt in marriage and society. It is ultimately based upon the view that no one should decide for her the image or lifestyle that she should adopt in life or place any restrictions upon her, not even God, the One who created her.

This is the identity that the Western secular nations present to the world when they propagate the image of the Western woman globally. This is the identity that they want the women throughout the globe, including the Muslim World, to embrace when they adopt the image of the Western woman. The Western media has a great part to play in achieving this goal, from the music and film industries imported into the Muslim lands that glamorise the image of the Western woman, to the fashion, cosmetic, and beauty adverts in magazines and billboards on the streets of Turkey, the Arab world and the Subcontinent. The international televising of the Miss World Beauty Contest is simply another style to achieve the same objective. In December 2002, over two billion people globally tuned in to watch the show.

Any image that a woman may adopt based upon an alternative identity, such as that of Islam and the Muslim woman, where the woman defines her appearance and lifestyle completely upon the command of her Creator rather than her own mind, is viewed as ugly, backward, and oppressive. This is best illustrated in the following expressions from some Western personalities. In 2001, Cherie Blair commented openly in a press conference on the Islamic dress code of the Muslim woman, saying, "Nothing more I think symbolizes the oppression of the woman than the *burka*". The French politician Jean-Marie Le-Pen said about the *hijab* that, "It keeps us away from ugly looking women".

Western women have become pre-occupied with the concepts of beauty, image and appearance. They mistakenly associate beauty with success, confidence and being valued and respected in the society.

With these above points in mind, we should examine whether the image and identity of the Western woman is really what the woman, Muslim or non-Muslim, should aspire towards. We should understand whether she is really free to look and dress how she chooses or whether she needs to conform to certain societal expectations. Has the quest for beauty instilled within her confidence and led to her being valued and respected in the society? Is it a myth or not?

The Quest for Beauty; a Matter of Choice or Compulsion?

The Western woman prides herself on the belief that the quest for beauty is a matter of choice; that she is free to define for herself the image and appearance that she wishes to adopt in life. However, the reality is far removed from this naive view.

THE CONCEPT OF BEAUTY

The Western capitalist society in which she lives has set the standard of what constitutes 'The beautiful woman' as being tall, slim, fair, blonde and voluptuous. It is the image that confronts the woman every day of her life. This is the view of beauty that is glamorised in the thousands of beauty, fashion and lifestyle magazines sold daily on the streets of London, Paris, Rome, New York and Los Angeles such as Vogue, Cosmopolitan and Marie Clare. It is the look encouraged by the multibillion dollar beauty and cosmetic industry. This is the expectation of beauty that is presented to society by the various models used in the advertising industry and the personalities that are glamorised in the entertainment industry. The perfect figure and look bombards the homes of millions daily in the form of models such as Claudia Schiffer, Cindy Crawford, Naomi Campbell or personalities such as Britney Spears, Jennifer Aniston, Holly Valance or Victoria Beckham. They have become the standards for women to aspire towards. The exposure to this particular image of beauty begins at a young age from the 'Teen' magazines such as 'Just 17', 'Cosmo Girl' or 'Sugar' which discuss everything from beauty tips, to the lifestyles of the 'rich and famous'. Everyone from 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer' to 'Miss Dynamite' are pushed as role models.

With such a dominant view of beauty dominating the society, women living in the West feel a constant pressure to measure up to such expectations, if not for herself then to ensure that she will appear

attractive to the men in the society who are also not isolated from such images. They too have been affected by the imposed view of what constitutes beauty.

This is clearly evident in the fact that the Western woman has become increasingly consumed, obsessed and preoccupied with the way that she looks, often above other issues in life. The U K beauty industry secures revenues to the tune of £8.9 billion every year. The US cosmetic industry grows by 10% each year. An article in Time magazine in 1988 described how diets feed a \$74 billion a year industry in the US, totalling one-third of the nation's annual food bill. In the US it is said that urban professional women devote up to a third of their income to 'beauty maintenance', and consider it a necessary investment. In a study performed by the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine, 33,000 American women told researchers that they would rather lose 10 to 15 pounds than achieve any other goal. In 1998, a campaign called 'The Bread for Life' surveyed over 900 young women between the ages of 18 and 24 living in the West and published a report called 'Pressure to be Perfect Report'. When respondents were asked what the most attractive aspect of a woman was, 55% of the women rated looks, whilst only 1% attached importance to intelligence.

This pressure to measure up to certain expectations has produced a consistent mentality of insecurity and paranoia in the Western woman with regards to her appearance. Is she too fat, too thin, too tall, too short, too fair, too dark or too old? A report of a study quoted in the New York Times in 1985 said, "Physically handicapped people generally express an overall satisfaction about their bodies - while able-bodied women, we saw, do not." There is a prevailing fear of being fat, gaining weight, and the aging process such that they have almost come to be viewed as diseases. Dr Arthur K Balin, who was president of the American Aging Association in 1988, said to The New York Times that, "it would benefit physicians to look upon ugliness not as a cosmetic issue but a disease." The Bread for Life Campaign study mentioned above also found that only 25% of the women surveyed were happy with their weight and 22% of the women stayed at home because they did not feel good about their appearance.

The wide reaching nature of this issue in its affect on women has led

scientists and doctors to define a term for it - Body Dysmorphic Disorder. This is described as an abnormal preoccupation with a perceived defect in one's appearance. In this quest for beauty, rather than building confidence, the woman has become crippled by a lack of confidence and oppression of the mind. Even the women who supposedly represent the ultimate view of beauty - the models on the catwalk - do not feel secure with their image. The Independent Newspaper recently reported the suffering of various well known super models such as Karen Mulder who suffered from anorexia and depression. She eventually took an overdose of sleeping tablets which resulted in her lapsing into a coma. Clearly the notion that beauty brings happiness is also a myth. This whole reality may be summed up in the words of the Western writer, Mary Wollstonecraft, who wrote in her book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, "Taught from infancy that beauty is a woman's sceptre, the mind shapes itself to the body and roaming round in its gilt cage, only seeks to adorn its prison."

THE CONCEPT OF FASHION

If we examine the notion that the Western woman decides for herself her dress code in life, defining for herself what is attractive and what is not, we can see that the reality is otherwise. The global fashion industry is worth \$1.5 thousand billion (greater than the global weapons industry) and sets the standard of what is the acceptable attire for the woman to wear and what is not. Expectations are set of what look is attractive and which are outdated and ugly that the woman ultimately feels pressurised to live up to in order to be accepted and not ridiculed by friends, colleagues and society. Furthermore, we should examine who sets such standards of how a woman should present herself to society. The majority of the top fashion designers in the world, both past and present are men, who in their designs propagate their view of beauty and how the woman should dress - Gianni Versace, Alexander McQueen who designs for Gucci, Dolce & Gabbana, John Galliano who designs for Christian Dior, and Karl Lagerfeld who is linked with Chanel. Such men, who also carry the concept of freedom that emanates from the secular belief, feel that they are free to view a woman in any manner that they wish and have therefore defined beautiful clothing as that which reveals the shape and body of the woman. The more revealing, the more beautiful. So it is clear to see that even with regards to her dress, there are certain

expectations that the Western woman has to conform to in society, and moreover such expectations have been mainly established by men who have decided that it is their right to see the women of society exposing their body and their beauty to them.

The quest for body-beauty is therefore not a choice for the Western woman and the concept that she is free to choose her own image is a myth. It has not built confidence and self-esteem in the woman but rather produced a mentality of insecurity and obsession with her appearance.

Unrealistic Expectations

It is clear to see that there are certain expectations of the Western woman with regards to beauty and appearance that have been set by the society and the human being. However, as with any situation where the human being decides for himself/herself how to live their life from their own mind and desires, there will be flaws and problems. The flaws and problems linked to the human being deciding how a woman should present herself to the world is that unrealistic targets and objectives will be defined. How can you expect all the women of the world, or even in a society, or community to measure up to a certain height, a certain weight, a certain shade of skin and hair colour, a certain look and a certain age. Such a concept is irrational.

For example, the average model is less than 23% of the weight of the average American woman. Are all women then expected to achieve this weight? The result of such expectations is that many women feel that they should. A survey performed by the University of Cincinnati College of medicine in 1984 on 33,000 women found that 75% of those aged 18 to 35 believed that they were fat while only 25% were medically overweight; 45% of the underweight women thought that they were too fat.

The fact that this thinking does not fit the reality of life is also reflected in the fact that the advertising industry often has to take certain artificial measures to present the model or personality with the look which sells the magazines and the cosmetic, beauty, or fashion product. Bob Ciano, once art director of Life magazine, said, “no picture of a woman goes unretouched...even a well-known (older) woman who does not want to be retouched...we still persist in trying to make her look like she’s in her fifties”. Dalma Heyn, who was editor of two women’s magazines, stated that airbrushing from women’s faces is routine, and said that women’s magazines “ignore older women or pretend that they don’t exist; magazines try to avoid photographs of older women, and when they

feature celebrities who are over sixty, 'retouching artists' conspire to 'help' beautiful women look more beautiful, ie less than their age." She goes on to say, "By now readers have no idea what a real woman's 60 year old face looks like in print because it's made to look 45. Worse, 60 year old readers look in the mirror and think they are too old, because they're comparing themselves to some retouched face smiling back at them from a magazine." Computer imaging that is used to change photographic reality is often used in women's beauty magazines upon the models to enhance their appearance and features.

Even those women who are often cited as the pinnacles of beauty have lost serious weight or have admitted to having had cosmetic surgery in order to fit a certain image and have the perfect face; Britney Spears, Jennifer Lopez, Jane Fonda. Cher, the singer, and queen of cosmetic surgery, once said, "I don't know how many more times I can beat this face into submission". Such are the unrealistic expectations set by the beauty and entertainment industry that the average woman in the West is following suit to strive for the perfect body, willing to undergo dangerous operations or procedures to achieve this goal. In the US in 2001, there were 8.5 million cosmetic surgical and non-surgical procedures performed with women comprising 88% of the total. From 1997 to 2001 there was a 304% increase in the number of cosmetic procedures in the US. The top five operations were; lipoplasty, eyelid surgery, breast augmentation, nose reshaping, and face lifts (statistics from the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery). In one study, it found that 1 in 40 women in the US have had breast augmentation. The new fad is "Botox" injections, used to remove wrinkles and involves freezing the facial muscles with injections of Botulin toxin. It does not take an expert to predict the possible consequences of such a procedure.

These actions are all performed in the name of attaining a certain image or appearance that in reality does not exist or can only be achieved by one or two women within the whole population. In addition, because such false expectations are set by the human being, the concept of what constitutes the perfect body and face will always be changing with time. Are these really the goals (based upon a myth) that an intelligent woman looks up to, then struggles with her time, money and effort to achieve in her life?

The Dangers of the Beauty Myth

Such a concept that all the women within a society should measure up to a certain look is not just irrational but dangerous, and therefore irresponsible for it can cause individuals to take extreme measures in order to shape up to the expectation of what is described as a "beautiful woman" causing a number of problems and disorders.

For example, the extreme desire to achieve a particular body weight or to reduce body fat to a certain level has produced a whole host of health and eating disorders. It is said that models and actresses had body fat levels as low as 10% of body weight, while the average required for a healthy woman should be between 22-26%. This obsession with body shape and weight can very often give rise to the eating disorder Anorexia Nervosa - a very serious illness causing symptoms such as hypothermia, low blood pressure, irregular heart rhythms, and infertility and can be fatal. It is described as "an intense fear of gaining weight or becoming fat, even though underweight" and involves individuals performing excessive exercise, taking laxatives to prevent absorption of food and simply not eating. The National Institute of Mental Health in the US claimed that every day in the US, Americans spend on average \$109 million on diet or diet related products; 1 in 20 women in the US have anorexia, bulimia, or binge eating disorder; 1 in 3 of all dieters develop compulsive dieting attitudes and behaviour, and of these 1 in 4 develop partial or full eating disorders. In the US, 1,000 women die every year from anorexia (American Anorexia/Bulimia Association).

In the year 2000, the British Medical Association published a report discussing the reasons for the increasing levels of anorexia in the UK and elsewhere. They wrote, "The media's obsession with painfully thin fashion models has contributed to the growth in eating disorders among young girls...The degree of thinness exhibited by models chosen to promote products is both unachievable and biologically inappropriate."

It is therefore not surprising the US, whose models and actresses are often the role models that many women around the world look to imitate with respect to image, also lays claim to the highest levels of anorexia in the world.

The dangers of this beauty myth cannot be overstated because such images of women portrayed by the media and advertising industry are increasingly ensnaring the younger generations and moulding the mentality of children as to how a successful woman should look. A survey performed in 1997 by the British Schools' Health Education Unit found that 1 in 5 schoolgirls aged between 14 and 15 had nothing for breakfast, 1 in 7 did not eat lunch, and 6 out of 10 felt that they needed to lose weight. In the Anne Collins Diet web site, she states that various surveys found that 80% of 10 year olds were worried in case they became fat; 70% of 6th grade girls said they were concerned about weight, shape and started to diet when they were 9-11 years; 50% of children aged 8-10 years were unhappy with their size. Such attitudes can so easily transform into eating disorders. 1 in 100 women in the US aged 12 to 18 have Anorexia Nervosa (*American Anorexia/Bulimia Association*). Dr. Dee Dawson from Rhodes Farm Clinic that treats sufferers of eating disorders stated that children as young as 6 or 7 were seen in the clinic who were worried about being fat.

Naomi Wolf, in her book *The Beauty Myth* gives an analogy that is appropriate to describe the reality of the beauty myth. It is like the original Iron Maiden that was a medieval German instrument of torture. It was a body shaped casket painted with the limbs and features of a beautiful smiling young woman. The victim who was tortured was slowly enclosed inside her, and then the lid was shut to immobilize the victim who either died from starvation or from some metal spikes embedded in her interior.

Such has become the obsession with weight and body fat that certain web sites have arisen that encourage women to lose as much body fat as possible, even if this requires purging. One web site entitled 'Rexia World' has as the title on one of its pages, 'Thinner, Bonier and Closer to Perfection'. It states the following, "Thin Commandments - If u aren't thin u aren't attractive. Being thin is more important than being healthy. U must buy clothes, cut ur hair, take laxatives, starve yourself...anything

to make yourself look thinner. Thou shall not eat without feeling guilty. Thou shall not eat fattening food without punishing oneself afterwards. Thou shall count calories/restrict intake accordingly. What the scale says is the most important thing. Losing weight is good/gaining weight is bad. You can never be too thin. Being thin/not eating r signs of true will power & success."

Does this not speak for itself with respect to the dangers of making the image of the Western woman the ideal of womanhood?

4

Has the Quest for Beauty Elevated the Way that the Woman in the West is Valued in Society?

The understanding that is often held by women living outside the West who aspire for the image embodied by the Western woman, is that the Western woman is valued and respected in the society in which she lives. Such an image is obviously created by the Western media and entertainment industry imported into foreign lands. Those who actually live in the West, under the secular capitalist system, understand that this notion is fantasy rather than reality.

If we first examine what effect the emphasis on beauty and image has had on the manner that the Western woman values herself, we can see that although many would like to judge themselves upon their intelligence and skills, in truth, many feel a failure if they do not measure up to the prevalent view of beauty. Germaine Greer, the Western feminist and writer, says in her book, *The Whole Woman*, “Every woman knows that, regardless of all her other achievements, she is a failure if she is not beautiful.” As previously mentioned, in a study performed by the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine, 33,000 American women told researchers that they would rather lose 10 to 15 pounds than achieve any other goal. ‘The Bread for Life Campaign’ found that of the 900 women they surveyed between the ages of 18 and 24, 55% of the women rated looks as the most attractive thing in a woman and only 1% said intelligence. It is clear therefore that many of the women who have adopted the Western identity value their appearance over their thinking, intelligence, skills, and even personality, even though they may try and hide this fact from themselves.

So how does the Western society value and judge a woman? The Western writer, Camille Paglia wrote in a college text, entitled, ‘Sexual Harassment - Confrontations and Decisions’, “Western culture has a roving eye. Male sex is hunting and scanning: boys hang yelping from

honking cars, acting like jerks over strolling girls; men lurching on girders go through the primitive book of wolf whistles and animal clucks. Everywhere, the beautiful woman is scrutinized and harassed. She is the ultimate symbol of human desire.”

It is clear to all who look beyond the superficialities of the society that the woman in the West is judged according to the level of her beauty rather than her intelligence. This is at all levels. The majority of men who also carry the Western secular mentality and have been affected by the beauty myth, seek looks over intelligence in a relationship. They look for the fair, tall, slim, ‘trophy’ to accompany them as they walk down the street - to show off their ‘catch’ or ‘prize’ to their friends and family. It is no surprise therefore that the woman in the West feels insecure with regards to her appearance, feeling that it is her key to getting married or preventing her husband or partner from running away with the next girl who is prettier, slimmer, taller or fairer.

The reason to explain this reality is simple. The same concept of freedom held by the woman who embraces the Western secular identity who feels that she has the right to dress how she likes and adopt any image that fits her desires, is also held in the minds of the men who adopt the Western secular identity. The view is that they are free to view and treat a woman in any way that they wish, for their mind and desires are the standards by which they live their life. Indeed, this is the essence of the concept of freedom and the basis of the Western identity.

When it comes to the question of hiring women for employment or promoting them at work, it can be seen that image and beauty is becoming increasingly important in all fields, not simply the usual advertising, beauty, and entertainment industry. The citing of a few cases in the West should provide sufficient proof for this reality that is a dominant mentality in both male and female employers in every sector from business to politics, the medical profession to law. In the US in 1975, Catherine McDermott sued the Xerox Corporation because they withdrew a job offer on the grounds of her weight. In the same decade, National Airlines fired stewardess Ingrid Fee because she was ‘too fat’ - four pounds over the line. In 1983, in the US, TV anchor woman Christine Craft sued her ex-employers Metromedia Inc. on the charge that she had been dismissed by them on the grounds that, as she quotes

her employer, she was “too old, too unattractive, and not deferential to men.” The judge ruling over the case favoured on the side of the company. One journalist said with regards to the case, “There are thousands of Christine Crafts...We keep silent. Who can survive a blacklist?” Dan Air was challenged in 1987 for hiring only pretty young women as air crews. They defended their action on the basis of customer preference for pretty young women. A 54 year old American woman quoted in *The Sexuality of Organization*, said her boss replaced her one day without warning. “He had told her that he ‘wanted to look at a younger woman’ so his ‘spirits could be lifted’”.

The manner in which the Western society values the various qualities of a woman can also be seen when we understand that the only professions that a woman consistently gets paid more than a man are modelling and prostitution. A super model can sometimes make £10,000 in one day - the same amount earned by a junior doctor or teacher in 6 months of work.

Those women who do manage to secure a job or gain a promotion, are often faced with a barrage of sexual harassment where the man does not respect her on the basis that she can perform her job well but still views her as an object simply to play to his desires. A study in 1993 by the Industrial Society found that 54% of women in the UK had been sexually harassed at work. The Claremont College Working Papers (2001) found in one survey that 70% of women who were in active duty in the British army reported some type of sexual harassment in the past 12 months prior to the study. Respondents to queries of sexual harassment by the Equal Opportunities Commission illustrate that such a mentality is not simply present in one sector of the workforce but in every part of the society - managers, the police force, the medical and law professions, and the political arena to quote a few examples. In a study reported by the American Association of University Women in 1993, it stated that 85% of schoolgirls had been sexually harassed; 25% of them by school employees.

It is clear to see that the woman in the West is valued in the majority of cases and on most levels on the basis of her appearance rather than her intelligence. She is viewed by many of the men within the society simply as a commodity to fulfil their desires rather than a valuable contributor

to the society. The ultimate proof for this is surely the epidemic of rape that plagues the Western nations. 1 in 20 women in England and Wales have been raped. 167 women in England and Wales are raped every day (figures from the British Home Office). A woman is raped more than once every minute in the US. In one survey of 114 undergraduates in the US, commissioned by *Ms Magazine* in 1988, 83.5% of the men gave the reply yes to the statement that “Some women look like they’re just asking to be raped”. This dangerous mentality held by the men in the society based upon the concept of freedom - that they are free to view a woman in any manner that they wish, is also being bred in the minds of the youngsters. In a UCLA study of 14 to 18 year olds, more than 50% of the boys thought that it was ‘OK’ for a man to rape a woman if he was sexually aroused by her. In a *Ms Magazine* survey of undergraduates in the US in 1988, 1 in 12 of the respondents had raped or tried to rape a woman since age 14. In the UK, boys as young as 13, have been placed on the Sex Offenders Register after performing indecent sexual acts against girls. The expectations for the future of the society can only be described as dire.

The reality is clear, beauty does not earn respect for the woman within the Western societies nor elevate her standing and bring value to her life. It is a myth. The Western woman has become an object judged simply on superficialities rather than her thinking and intelligence. Allah ﷻ perfectly describes this whole reality in an *ayah*;

﴿وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَعْمَالُهُمْ كَسَرَابٍ بَقِيَعَةٍ يَحْسَبُهُ الظَّمَانُ مَاءً حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَهُ لَمْ يَجِدْهُ شَيْئًا وَوَجَدَ اللَّهَ عِنْدَهُ فَوَفَّاهُ حِسَابَهُ وَاللَّهُ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ﴾

“But the Unbelievers - their deeds are like a mirage in sandy deserts which the man parched with thirst mistakes for water, until when he comes up to it, he finds it to be nothing.” [TMQ Al-Nur: 39]

5

What Drives the Beauty Myth?

The facts are clear with regards to the woman who adopts the Western identity. She is not really free to define for herself her own image but is pressurised to live up to certain expectations; these expectations are themselves a fantasy; the quest for beauty has not brought her respect in the society or made her valued.

If all these points are true then we should ask ourselves certain questions. Why is it that this beauty myth continues to be propagated to women near and far? Why do more women not realise that they are being deceived daily? Why is the image of the Western woman based upon the Western identity and secular view of life then presented as the role model for women globally to imitate?

The answer, as with every issue that is defined by the capitalist man-made way of life, is money and profit. The beauty, cosmetic, fashion, and plastic surgery industries are driven by multibillion dollar corporations, as are the magazines that advertise them and encourage the images that they represent.

The quest for beauty therefore needs to be maintained in order for the profit-margins of these companies to be protected. The unrealistic images and targets for women to aspire to have to continue in order that their revenue continues to grow as women persistently struggle in order to spend their money to measure up to the constantly changing goals. Naomi Wolf quotes in her book, *The Beauty Myth*, “An economy that depends on slavery needs to promote images of slaves that ‘justify’ the institution of slavery”. Such a beauty myth needs to be hidden as far as possible from the public eye in order to keep the dollars and pounds rolling in. Hence, the image of the woman of the West continues to be the role model for women worldwide to feed the appetite of a few greedy company directors and corporation owners. An economist John Kenneth

Galbraith commented on this quest for beauty, saying that it “has been forced on us by popular sociology, by magazines, and by fiction to disguise the fact that woman in her role of consumer has been essential to the development of our industrial society...Behaviour that is essential for economic reasons is transformed into a social virtue.”

As mentioned previously, the beauty industry in the UK secures revenue of £8.9 billion every year. The fashion industry has global revenue totalling \$1.5 thousand billion every year, whilst diet items are a \$74 billion a year industry in the US (Time Magazine 1988). A cosmetic surgeon in the US can very easily earn \$1 million a year. In fact, when India won the Miss World Beauty for two years, a number of womens’ groups in India commented that it was less to do with the outstanding beauty of Miss India and more to do with international cosmetic companies wanting to penetrate the Indian market.

In addition to this, the medium of TV and magazines receive millions in advertising from these industries in order to present the images of “Beautiful women” who supposedly use or wear their products. The cosmetic and toiletries industries spend proportionately more on advertising than any other industry. At one time, a single issue of the beauty magazine Harper’s and Queen carried £100,000 worth of ads from cosmetic companies. As a result, it is not surprising to read the words of one writer for ‘Cover-up’ magazine, who said, “Beauty editors are rarely able to write freely about cosmetics” because advertisers require an editorial promotion as a condition for placing the ad.

Having understood this, should the intelligent woman really be taken in by these lies and deception that surrounds the image of the Western woman or should she think carefully about the correct identity and image to adopt for life?

6

The Affect of the Beauty Myth upon the Muslim Woman

Unfortunately the Beauty myth has affected a number of Muslim women both in the West and the Muslim world. For those living in the West, it is easy to understand why, for they are exposed to the same images of women and expectations as the non-Muslim women in the society. However, in the Muslim world it is no less surprising, for the same Western culture is imported into our lands via the media, the entertainment industry and the advertising industry. The Western lifestyle magazines such as Vogue, Cosmopolitan, and Marie Clare line the shelves of the newsagents and shops of Pakistan, Bangladesh, Turkey, the Arab world and Southeast Asia. Beauty parlours that propagate the image of the Western woman increase daily on the streets of Karachi, Lahore, Dhaka, Abu Dhabi, Kuala Lumpur etc. In October 2002, the BBC reported on a story about Afghanistan called 'Afghan Lipstick Liberation'. It discussed a current project underway, funded by US money to provide the women of Afghanistan with a Western form of a Beauty School to be built in Kabul inside the compound of the Afghanistan Ministry of Women's Affairs and to be completed by January 2003. Its objective is to train some of the women of Afghanistan in cutting hair and the 'beauty business' with make-up donated for it from top cosmetic companies such as Revlon and MAC. It is clear that the aim is to instil within the minds of the women the desire to imitate the appearance of the women in the West.

Unfortunately, the result of this reality is that a number of Muslim women have adopted or aspire to adopt the image of the Western woman that is based upon the Western identity and view of life of keeping God away from life. The Western concept of what constitutes beauty has become the criterion to judge their own appearance; tall, slim, fair and young. When seeking for marriage, the boy or his parents may look for a girl that fits such a description over the strength of her *deen*. The unfortunate view that many Muslim girls recognise exists within the

community or society is "the fairer the more beautiful the woman". Such has become the desire to fit such an image that many girls use various measures to lighten their skin, even bleaching, regardless of the possible consequences. One type of bleaching product called Jolen has been associated with causing cancer. In addition, cosmetic surgery and anorexia have become increasingly more frequent both amongst Muslim women living in the West and those in the Muslim world. Issues that at one time were alien to the Muslim *Ummah* and the Muslim woman.

Even the Bollywood culture which has been recently popularized in the West and that many may associate with having its own distinct look for the woman and definition of fashion has in reality been moulded upon the same concepts that the Western identity embodies. The beauty and lifestyle magazines produced by the Asian market such as Asian Bride, Asian Woman and Libas discuss the same concept of the woman being free to decide her own appearance and behaviour and contain the same idea that there is a particular look that constitutes the beautiful woman. Such expectations are increasingly being mirrored on exactly the same look as the Western woman. The Indian actress Ashwariya Rai who is particularly popular in Bollywood at the moment, is often admired by many young Asian girls for her fair skin and blue eyes. Indeed, many well known Indian actresses are increasingly undergoing cosmetic surgery to measure up to expectations such as Karishma and Rekha. So in the Bollywood culture, the woman still decides according to the idea of freedom. Her mind and desires as in the Western identity are the standard by which she decides her image, the clothes that she will wear in society, and the relationships that she will have. For those who pride themselves on the fact that the image of the woman in Bollywood is much more "modest" than in Hollywood, should perhaps examine the fact that the short blouses, the body hugging *shalwar kameez*, and the body exposing *sarees* worn by the Indian actresses would not look out of place in the fashion section of most Western fashion magazines.

Even recently on a BBC documentary, entitled "Faith in Fashion", it discussed specifically the concept of how a woman can be Muslim but still be part of the fashion circle defined by the Western society and aspire to adopt an 'Islamicised' version of Western dress - whatever that may be!

However, what needs to be examined is the underlying objective of the West in aiming for the Muslim woman living in the West to adopt its concept of beauty and the objective in importing the same images of beauty into the Muslim world. For the Muslim living in the West, the aim is to integrate her into the society such that she loses her Islamic identity and forgets her responsibilities and obligations as a Muslim woman. For the Muslim world, the aim is also to erode the Islamic thinking and behaviour of the Muslim woman and for her to adopt the Western identity. However, it is but one style of many of cultural colonialism. One clear example of this is the example discussed above of the Beauty school being built in Kabul. Of all the problems that women in Afghanistan are facing at the moment such as famine, lack of access to clean water and medicines, the West decides that the priority for her is to know how to beautify herself! Such an objective by the Western powers has as its basis the prevention of the return of Islam as a way of life to the Muslim world and for the Western secular way of life with its culture and system to continue to prevail over the globe, to protect their material interests and maintain their hegemony.

This is in essence the consequence of the Muslim woman aspiring for the images of beauty defined by the West and embracing the Western identity. This agenda of the West is unknowingly aided.

Islam and the Concept of Beauty

In contrast to the Western identity that has made the mind and desires of the human being the standard to decide how to live life, the Islamic identity is based upon the belief that the Creator of the human being and the universe has sovereignty and sole right to decide how an individual should live their life. After all, it is He ﷻ alone who created the human being with every instinct and need that he has and knows how best to regulate them.

The Western secular way of life carries the concept of personal freedom that has ordained that the man and woman should be free to define for themselves how they should dress, their image, how they should view the opposite sex and what kind of relationships they should have, what roles they should adopt in marriage and society and overall how they should behave. In contrast, the Muslim, male and female, live their life on the basis that they are accountable to the Creator for every action that they perform in life. Therefore they understand that they should refer every issue to the laws and regulations, and the criterion of *halal* (permitted) and *haram* (forbidden) that has been prescribed by Him alone. For the Muslim woman therefore, her mind and her desires are not the arbiter in how she defines beauty, her image, or how she values herself but rather the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*. For the Muslim man, his desires should not be the standard used to decide how to view or treat the woman but rather the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*. Allah ﷻ says in Surah Al-Ahzab,

﴿وَمَا كَانَ لِمُؤْمِنٍ وَلَا لِمُؤْمِنَةٍ إِذَا قَضَى اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ أَمْرًا أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهُمُ الْخِيَرَةُ مِنْ أَمْرِهِمْ وَمَنْ يَعْصِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَالًّا مُبِينًا﴾

“It is not fitting for a believer, man or woman, when a matter has been decided by Allah and His Messenger, to have any option about their decision. If anyone disobeys Allah and His Messenger, he is indeed on a clearly wrong path.” [TMQ Al-Ahzab: 36]

Islam does not have a fixed concept of what constitutes ‘The Beautiful Woman’ and has not defined a specific image of a woman that represents beauty. Therefore there are no unrealistic expectations that the woman needs to strive towards nor that the man expects. Islam does however discuss the concept of the image that a Muslim woman should adopt in various circumstances and to whom she can reveal her complete beauty.

In the presence of all non-*mahrem* men (those to whom she can marry), the image that has been prescribed for the woman is that all parts of her body should be covered except her face and hands and that the clothes should not be thin such that her skin can be seen nor tight such that the shape of her body can be seen. Therefore, the whole of the body of the woman, including her neck, feet and hair (even one hair) except her face and hands are *anrab* (that which is *haram* to reveal to any non-*mahrem* man). Whatever is an exception to this, has to be defined by evidence from the Qur’an and *Sunnah* and not the mind.

In one *hadith* reported by ‘A’isha ؓ, she said that Asma bint Abu Bakr entered the quarters of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ wearing thin clothes. The Messenger ﷺ turned his face away and said,

((يا أسماء إن المرأة إذا بلغت المحيض لم يصلح أن يري فيها إلا هذا، وأشار إلي وجهه وكفيه))

“Oh Asmaa, if the woman reaches puberty, it is not allowed to be seen from her except this and this”, and he pointed to his face and hands. In Surah Al-Nur, Allah ﷻ says,

﴿وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَعْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا وَلَا يَضْرِبْنَ بِحُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَىٰ جُيُوبِهِنَّ

وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا لِبُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَائِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَاءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَائِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَاءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِي إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ نِسَائِهِنَّ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُنَّ أَوْ التَّابِعِينَ غَيْرِ أُولِي الْإِرْبَةِ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ أَوِ الطِّفْلِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يَظْهَرُوا عَلَىٰ عَوْرَاتِ النِّسَاءِ وَلَا يَضْرِبْنَ بِأَرْجُلِهِنَّ لِيُعْلَمَ مَا يُخْفِينَ مِنْ زِينَتِهِنَّ ﴿

“They should not show their charms (*zeenab*) in public beyond what may (decently) be apparent thereof; hence let them draw their head-coverings (*khumur*) over their necks and bosoms (*jujub*). And let them not display (more of) their charms to any but their husbands, their fathers, their husbands fathers, their sons, their husbands sons, their brothers, their brothers sons, their sisters sons, their womenfolk, their concubines, such male attendants as are beyond all sexual desire, or children that are as yet unaware of women’s nakedness; and let them not swing their legs (in walking) so as to draw attention to their hidden charms.” [TMQ Al-Nur: 31]

Ibn ‘Abbas explained the words, “...beyond what may (decently) be apparent thereof” to be referring to the face and hands.

In addition, in the presence of non-*mahrem* men, she should not wear any clothing, jewellery or make-up that would draw attention to her beauty (*tabarry*). As Allah ﷻ relates in Surah Al-Ahzab;

﴿وَلَا تَبْرَجْنَ تَبْرُجَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ الْأُولَىٰ﴾

“...and do not keep exhibiting your beauty and decorations like what used to happen in the *Jabilyyyah* period (before Islam).” [TMQ Al-Ahzab: 33]

In addition, when the woman leaves her home and enters the public arena, the image or dress that she has been commanded to wear is the *khimar* (a head cover that covers the entire head, neck, and the opening of the garment on the chest) and the *jilbab* (a one piece dress that covers her (home) clothes and drapes down to the floor). If she leaves the home without these two pieces of clothing then she would be sinful for she has neglected a command from her Creator ﷻ. The evidence for this is clear.

The verse above discusses the obligation of the *khimar*,

﴿وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَىٰ جُيُوبِهِنَّ﴾

“Let them draw their head-coverings (*khumur*) over their necks and bosoms (*juyub*).”
[TMQ Al-Nur: 31]

A verse in Surah Al-Ahzab, discusses the obligation of the *jilbab*;

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لَأَزُوجَكِ وَبَنَاتِكَ وَنِسَاءَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ يُدْنِينَ
عَلَيْهِنَّ مِنْ جَلَابِيبِهِنَّ﴾

“Oh Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks (*jalabeeb*) all over their bodies.” [TMQ Al-Ahzab: 59]

In addition, in one *hadith* narrated by Umm Atiyya ؓ, she said,

“The Messenger of Allah ﷺ ordered us to bring out the young women, the menstruating women and veiled women for the two Eid festivals. The menstruating women were to keep away from prayer, yet witnessing the goodness and the *da'wah* (address) to the Muslims. I asked, ‘O Messenger of Allah, what about the one who does not have a *jilbab*?’ He ﷺ said;

((لتلبسها أختها من جلبابها))

“Let her use the *jilbab* of her sister.”

Beauty for the Muslim woman is to follow to the letter these *ahkam* (rules) and ugliness is to leave them aside and follow our own desires. She does not have to measure up to the shallow standards set by any human being. To adopt such an image and behaviour is clearly within the capability of any woman and undoubtedly does not give rise to the host of problems such as eating disorders that result from the unrealistic expectations of appearance, body size and shape imposed upon the woman by the Western identity.

Although Islam does not have a fixed concept of what constitutes

‘The beautiful face or figure’, the Muslim woman is encouraged to perform certain actions that will make her appearance appealing to her husband such as dressing up for her husband and presenting herself in a clean and tidy manner. She knows that in doing so she secures the pleasure of the Creator. However, she performs this action, knowing that she is not trying to match up to the norms of society in the shape of her figure or the fairness of her face but rather according the limits that have been prescribed upon her by her Creator. Similarly, the Muslim husband, when shaping his likes and dislikes would be careful to ensure that they are not simply moulded by the unrealistic expectations of the Western society.

8

How does the Muslim Woman Value Herself

The Muslim woman does not value herself on something as superficial as beauty. Nor does she make the shallow judgement that she is a failure if she does not measure up to the societal definition of what constitutes a 'Beautiful Woman'. She understands clearly that such images are a myth and are used as a distraction from thinking about the important questions in life such as the true purpose of life and how to organise the affairs of the human beings in the correct manner.

The Muslim woman understands that the basis upon which she should judge herself upon is not her face but her thinking and her behaviour. She values herself on how obedient a slave she is to her Creator and the quality and quantity of actions she performs in life, in accordance with His ﷻ obligations and refraining from His ﷻ prohibitions, to earn His ﷻ pleasure, knowing that this is the supreme success in this life and the hereafter. For this is the key to eternal bliss in paradise. Allah ﷻ relates in Surah Al-Ahzab,

﴿إِنَّ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَالْمُسْلِمَاتِ وَالْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَالْقَانِتِينَ وَالْقَانِتَاتِ وَالصَّادِقِينَ وَالصَّادِقَاتِ وَالصَّابِرِينَ وَالصَّابِرَاتِ وَالْخَاشِعِينَ وَالْخَاشِعَاتِ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقَاتِ وَالصَّائِمِينَ وَالصَّائِمَاتِ وَالْحَافِظِينَ فُرُوجَهُمْ وَالْحَافِظَاتِ وَالذَّاكِرِينَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا وَالذَّاكِرَاتِ أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا﴾

"For Muslim men and women, for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for truthful men and women, for men and women who are patient and constant,

for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in charity, for men and women who fast, for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in God's praise, for them has God prepared forgiveness and a great reward." [TMQ Al-Ahzab: 35]

She therefore evaluates herself on the basis of her *taqwa* (obedience to Allah ﷻ), for this is the standard by which her Creator evaluates the human being and the basis upon which He ﷻ elevates one individual over another. Allah ﷻ says in Surah Al-Hujurat,

﴿إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ﴾

"The most honourable of you with Allah is that (believer) who has more Taqwa." [TMQ Al-Hujurat: 13]

The Prophet ﷺ also mentioned in his last sermon that no man is better than another except on the basis of *taqwa* and good deeds.

Therefore the struggle that the Muslim woman should engage in her life is not the quest for beauty or to try to imitate the shallow thinking of the Western identity but to adopt the Islamic personality as a whole and look to live by the laws of Islam as an individual, in her family life, and within society. The Prophet ﷺ once said,

((الدنيا كلها متاع وخير متاع الدنيا المرأة الصالحة))

"The world and all things in the world are precious but the most precious thing in the world is a virtuous woman."

9

How Should the Muslim Man Value the Muslim Woman?

As discussed above, the Muslim man is not free to view the woman in any manner that he wishes but understanding that he is accountable to the Creator; he restricts his view to that defined by Islam alone.

So for example, when seeking a woman for marriage, the Prophet ﷺ said in a very well known *hadith* narrated by Abu Hurayrah ؓ,

((تنكح المرأة لأربع: لمالها وحسبها ولجمالها ولدينها، فاظفر

بذات الدين تربت يداك))

“A woman is married for four things; her wealth, lineage, beauty and Islamic character . So gain success with the one who possesses a good character.”

Therefore, the Muslim man who seeks to gain the most reward in the hereafter will strive to find a wife whose understanding of the *deen* is clear and sound above all other qualities she may have. He will not be deceived by the beauty myth that propagates the view that for a woman to be beautiful she should have a certain look - tall, slim, fair or be seduced to the idea that appearance is the most important factor in a relationship. He will therefore seek a wife who has a sound understanding of the duties of a Muslim woman; who will devotedly perform the duties of a wife defined by Islam; who will with care and attention nurture the thinking of his children with a strong and powerful understanding of Islam; and who will be a guard for him with respect to his *deen* as he will be a guard for her. The Prophet ﷺ related in the following *hadith*,

((ليتخذ أحدكم قلبا شاكرا ولسانا ذاكرا وزوجة مؤمنة صالحة

تعيه على آخرته))

“The best property a man can have is a remembering tongue, a grateful heart, and a believing wife who reminds him of the hereafter (*akhira*).”

The reality in the Muslim world today is that unfortunately this correct mentality of how a woman should be valued is not present within the societies *en mass* but this is not surprising for there is no part of the Muslim world today that has the honour of implementing Islam comprehensively. In contrast, under the complete application of the Shari’ah within the framework of the Islamic State or *Khilafah*, where the true Islamic society would exist, such a mentality would naturally be nurtured within the society as a whole as evident in Islamic history.

So for instance, within the area of employment, a Muslim male employer within the Islamic society would understand his accountability to the Creator when hiring an individual for a particular job. He would understand that it is *haram* for him to appoint one person for the job solely on the basis of race and sex or beauty when another is better suited for it. In addition, he would not be able to use the woman for a role that would reveal her *‘awrah* for he would understand that as with the other men in the society; he does not have the right to see the *‘awrah* or full beauty of any non-*mahrem* woman, including those with whom he works. For example, the man even if he sees by accident other than the face and hands of a non-*mahrem* woman, the obligation from Islam is to lower his glance. In one *hadith* reported from Jarir ibn ‘Abdullah, he said, **“I asked the Messenger of Allah ﷺ about the look of surprise, so he commanded me to look away.”** In another *hadith* reported from Ali ؓ, he said, **“The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said to me,**

((لا تتبع النظرة الأولى وإنما لك الأولى وليست لك الثانية))

‘Do not follow up the (first) glance with a second look. The first is permitted for you but not the second.’”

The woman can also not engage in or be hired for any job that exploits her femininity or where her beauty is the quality that is utilised in the area of work such as modelling or advertising a product that draws

attention to her beauty. Such pictures that incite the sexual instinct of the man and reduce the woman to simply an object to be lusted over would be prohibited within a true Islamic society. In fact, it is even prohibited for a man to look more than once at the face of a woman who incites his desire, as shown clearly in the following *hadith*. Abu Dawud narrated that Al-Fadl ibn ‘Abbas at the time was the Prophet’s riding partner when a woman from Banu Khatham came seeking a *bukem*. Al-Fadl began to look at her and she at him so the Messenger of Allah ﷺ made al-Fadl turn his face away from her. This story has been narrated by ‘Ali bin Abu Talib ؑ who added, “al-Abbas said to the Prophet ﷺ, ‘O Messenger of Allah, why did you turn your cousin’s neck?’ He replied,

((رأيت شاباً وشابة فلم آمن الشيطان عليهما))

“I saw a young man and a young woman in such a situation that I feared what effect Shaytan might have upon them.”

Finally, the relationship between the non-*mahrem* man and woman at work, in the home and in the society at large has to be purely confined to the job at hand or the transaction being performed. It is *haram* for any socialising to take place outside of what the Shari’ah permits. This restriction, in addition to the fact that even within the workplace, men and women will be segregated due to one of the requirements of the Islamic social system, will ensure that the woman will be judged and promoted on the quality of her work rather than her beauty or using her ‘feminine charms’. She would also be able to perform her job efficiently as a doctor, teacher, engineer, scientist or businesswoman without the fear of being physically or sexually harassed by her male colleagues.

All of the above points and others illustrate that within Islam and the Islamic society, a woman is judged according to her character, her thinking, her intelligence, and her skills, making her a valuable contributor to the society as a whole. She is not viewed as a commodity to be exploited or objectified simply to fulfil the desires of the men of the society but rather is protected and valued in the society.

Germaine Greer, the embodiment of Western feminism, writes in her book *The Whole Woman*, “For years after *The Female Eunuch* was written I travelled the earth to see if I could glimpse a surviving whole woman.

She would be a woman who did not exist to embody male sexual fantasies or rely upon a man to endow her with identity and social status, a woman who did not have to be beautiful, who could be clever, who would grow in authority as she aged.” Our advice to her would be to end her travels and save her money by examining the true status of women within Islam and the *Khilafah* system.

10

The Muslim Woman is the Thinking Woman

The Muslim woman who understands with clarity that her true purpose of life is to seek the Pleasure of her Creator and knows with surety what faces her in the Hereafter; *Jannah* (paradise) or *Jahannum* (hellfire) is a thinking woman. She is not one who is deceived by the beauty myth and strives to adopt the shallow images propagated by the Western capitalist nations. She does not become consumed with the superficialities of in-depth discussions on the right look, the right hair, the right fashion statement or waste her time and effort trying to measure up to the unrealistic expectations of what the Western societies have defined as ‘The beautiful woman’. Her main worry in life is how to be the obedient servant to her Creator and accumulate the most rewards for the Hereafter.

Her role models in life are not the superficial film stars, musicians, and models in the West or east but rather the *Sababiyaat* ﷺ and Muslim women of the past who were devoted servants to Allah ﷻ fulfilling all of their obligations to Him ﷻ with every effort that they could. Such Muslim women were not identified and praised by the Prophet ﷺ, the scholars and Islamic history books of the past due to their beauty but rather their elevated characters and qualities of intelligence, generosity, humility, loyalty, courage, stamina, sacrifice and being devoted wives and loving mothers. They are recognised in Islamic culture not due to their face but due to being great thinkers, great scholars, great fighters, great poets and great politicians and *da’wah* carriers.

Women like Khadijah ﷺ the first wife of the Prophet ﷺ who supported her husband in the *da’wah* to establish the first Islamic State and endured all the difficulties and hardships that faced her with courage and patience, even witnessing the sufferings of her own children in the cause. The Prophet ﷺ said of her,

((لا والله ما أخلف الله لي خيراً منها ، آمنت بي إذ كفر الناس، وصدقتني إذ كذبني الناس، ورزقني الله منها أولاداً إذ حرمني النساء))

“I have not yet found a better wife than her. She had faith in me when everyone, even members of my own family and tribe did not believe me, and accepted that I was truly a Prophet and a Messenger of Allah. She converted to Islam, spent all her wealth and worldly goods to help me spread this faith, and this too at a time when the entire world seemed to have turned against me and persecuted me. And it is through her that Allah blessed me with children.”

Such was her character that Allah ﷻ himself sent *salam* to her as related in one *hadith* narrated by Abu Hurairah, it was said that the Angel Jibra’il came to the Prophet ﷺ and said,

((يا رسول الله هذه خديجة قد أتتك بإناء فيه إدام أو طعام أو شراب ، فإذا هي أتتك فاقرأ عليها السلام من ربها ومني ، و بشرها بيت في الجنة من قصب لا صخب فيه و لا نصب))

“O Allah’s Messenger! This is Khadijah, coming to you with a dish having meat soup. When she reaches you, greet her on behalf of her Lord and on my behalf, and give her the glad tidings of having a palace made of *Qasab* in Paradise, wherein there will be neither any noise nor any toil.” [Narrated by Bukhari]

Women like Fatimah ﷺ, the daughter of the Prophet ﷺ whose generosity shone out like a beacon. For example, on one occasion, Salman ﷺ, one of the companions of the Prophet ﷺ tried to find food for a Muslim who was hungry and had not eaten for some time. He led the Muslim to several houses but none could feed him. Suddenly he came across the house of Fatimah ﷺ, knocked on the door and informed her

of the purpose of the visit. With tears in her eyes, she told him that she had had nothing to eat in her house for the last three days. Still, reluctant to refuse a guest, she said, “I cannot send back a hungry guest without satisfying his hunger”. She gave a sheet of cloth that she owned to Salman ؓ, imploring him to take it to Shamoon, a Jew, and in its return to bring some corn. The Jew, who was so impressed by the generosity of the Prophet’s ؓ daughter embraced Islam. When Salman ؓ returned the corn, Fatimah grinded it and baked loaves of bread. When Salman ؓ suggested that she should keep some of it for herself and family, she replied that she had no right over it as she had given the cloth for the sake of Allah ؓ.

Women like ‘A’isha ؓ, the wife of the Prophet ؓ who had a brilliant mind and a remarkable memory, reporting over 2,000 *ahadith*. She had a deep understanding of *tafseer*, *hadith*, *fiqh* and Shari’ah. In one of the dreams of the Prophet ؓ, Angel Jibra’il brought her picture wrapped in the cover of green silk and said, “She is your wife in this world and the hereafter.”

Women like Khansaa who was an excellent poet and used this skill to motivate her son’s to fight the Jihad in order to raise the word of Allah ؓ the highest, saying to them, “You know the rewards Allah has promised for those who fight the disbelievers in His path. You must remember that the everlasting life of the Hereafter is far better than the temporary life of this world. When you get up tomorrow morning be prepared to contribute your best in the battle. Go ahead into the enemy lines seeking help from Allah ؓ. When you see the flames of war rising high, you get right in the centre and face the enemy chiefs. *InshaAllah* you will get your abode in paradise with honour and success”. The next day, all four of her sons advanced into the battle of Qadasiyyah, reciting the words of their mother and fought until they were killed. When Khansaa received the news of their death, she said, “*Alhamdulillah*. Glory to Allah who has honoured me with their martyrdom. I hope that Allah ؓ will unite me with them under the shade of His Mercy”.

Women like Umm Amarah ؓ who was a skilled fighter and fought in many battles including the Battle of Uhud, Hunayn and Yamamah. Who in the battle of Uhud protected the Prophet ؓ with her own body, receiving many injuries in the process. The Prophet ؓ once related about

the Battle of Uhud that wherever he turned, whether to the right or to the left, he saw Umm Amarah fighting to defend him. He ؓ prayed for her and her family who fought with such courage and strength that day, saying;

((اللهم اجعلهم رفقائي في الجنة))

“O Allah! Make this family my friends in Paradise.”

Women like Umm Shareek who devotedly carried the *da’wah* to Islam amongst the women of Quraysh to the level that she was expelled from the society by the leaders of the Quraysh and women like Sumayyah ؓ who was the first martyr of Islam, who continued to call the people to the worship of Allah ؓ while being tortured to death by Abu Jahl.

The Muslim woman is a thinking individual who does not blindly imitate and follow those around her, even if she goes against the norms of society. She is not an individual that is handicapped with low self-esteem linked to her image but rather she is full of confidence in the life that she has chosen for herself for she has established the truth of Islam through her own mind and conviction. Finally, she is not a woman who is simply consumed with her own image, appearance or life but rather an individual who knows about the affairs of the world, appreciates the problems of humanity and thinks carefully about her role in bringing to the reality the correct system to govern mankind; the *Khilafah*.