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An Explanation and Analysis of the Boundaries of Veil (Ĥijāb) and Chastity (‘Ifāf)

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Abstract

This paper’s central aim is to analyze fully the distinctions between the jurisprudential concept of veil and the moral concept of chastity. This difference has not been clearly explained in the literature and they have been mistakenly taken for one another in social rules. Adopting a descriptive, analytical, and critical method in the form of library research, the present research seeks to draw seven main distinctions between them. While “veil” in the sense of women’s body covering is an external jurisprudential obligation, “chastity” in the sense of abstinence in regard to sexual activities is an internal moral virtue. Every man and woman is obliged to perform chaste actions whereas every woman is not obliged to wear a veil. “Veil” can be seen as a quantitative measurable indicator but “chastity” can be seen as a qualitative cultural indicator. “Chastity” is a rational duty with a priori justification; in contrast, “veil” is a duty unconcerned with rationality which can be justified a posteriori. “Chastity” has advantages and disadvantages for society and thus is a social duty; on the contrary, “veil” as such does not have social advantages regardless of its overlap with “chastity” and it is useful for a person to wear a veil only because of the obedience of divine commands.

Keywords

Chastity, continence, veil, jurisprudence, ethics.

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