

Forceable Removal Of The Hijab Post-Karbala

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Forceable Removal Of The Hijab Post-Karbala

Answer Provided By The Porch Of Wisdom Institute

Under The Guidance Of

Ayatullah Shaykh Hadavi Tehrani

The Question and Answer below was extracted from:

<http://www.islamquest.net/fa/archive/question/fa39135> [10]

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Edited by Arifa Hudda

Published by the Islamic Publishing House – iph@iph.ca [11]

Concise Question

After the tragedy of Karbala, did the enemy army of ʻUmar ibn Saʻd remove the veils of the women and leave their heads uncovered with their hair showing, after the martyrdom of Imam Husayn? If so, how is this consistent with the honour (*ghayrah*) of Allah [in protecting the integrity, honour, and dignity of the women of the Ahl Al-Bayt], and the status of the Ahl Al-Bayt [and them always remaining fully covered from the presence of non-mahram men]?

Concise Answer

Based on reliable narrative sources and credible historical accounts of the tragedy of ʻAshura (the *Maqatil* Literature), after the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, the army of ʻUmar ibn Saʻd attacked the tents of the Ahl Al-Bayt, plundered their belongings, and took the women's jewellery. They also removed the **outer garments** of the women.

In most of these narrations, the below phrases have been used in Arabic:

جَاءُوا النِّسَاءَ مَلَاحِفَهُنَّ عَنْ ظُهُورِهِنَّ.

They pulled the women's cloaks from their backs.

يَنْزِعُونَ الْمَلَاحِفَ عَنْ ظُهُورِنَا.

They are removing the cloaks from our backs.

يَنْتَزِعُونَ مِلْحَافَةَ الْمَرْأَةِ عَنْ ظَهْرِهَا.

They are snatching the woman's cloak from her back.

تَنَازَعُ ثُوبَهَا عَلَى ظَهْرِهِ.

Her garment is being pulled off of her back.

Considering the meaning of *milhafah* (cloak), this does not imply that the women were completely uncovered such that the skin of their bodies was exposed, nor that their hair was exposed either.

We must realize that at that time, women wore many layers of clothing, such as garments that covered their hair and body, in addition to outer garments – similar to the modern-day *chadors* (worn by women

in Iran), or *abayyas* (like women wear in Iraq or Arabia).

The enemy army took off the **outer garments** of the women which means that they were **not** left without any hijab or completely uncovered – as they still had other layers of clothing underneath that outer garment.

Even if we accept the premise of the question, it does not contradict the status of the Ahl Al-Bayt, or the honour of Allah with respect to the Ahl Al-Bayt because uncovering for a woman is blameworthy when it is **voluntary – not when it is forced**.

Detailed Question

Is it true, as mentioned in various accounts (in the books of *Maqatil*), that after the tragedy of Karbala[ؑ] and the captivity of the family of Imam Husayn, the women had their veils (*maؑjar*) and head coverings (*maqnah*) taken away, leaving their heads bare [with their hair showing]? Would the honour of Allah (in respect to these noble personalities) allow such an act to take place? Are these accounts accurate or not? Is discussing such matters compatible with the dignity of the Ahl Al-Bayt – the family of Prophet Muhammad?

Detailed Answer

Based on reliable narrative sources and historical accounts (in the books of *Maqatil*), after the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, the army of ؑUmar ibn Saؑd attacked the tents of the Ahl Al-Bayt and began looting whatever they could find. Women and children ran to the desert – crying, mourning, and calling for help.

The enemies then set fire to the tents, removed the women's **outer garments**, looted their jewellery, took rings from their fingers, ripped off earrings from their ears, and confiscated anklets from their feet.

They went so far as to physically scuffle with the women and children to take their cloaks and clothes off, seeking to plunder everything the women and children had.

The members of the army of ؑUmar ibn Saؑd did not respect the sanctity of the Ahl Al-Bayt at all to the extent that some of the women sought refuge with ؑUmar ibn Saؑd and complained about the severity of Shimr's crimes and those of his wicked group. Upon hearing this, apparently, ؑUmar ibn Saؑd ordered them to stop looting the tents.

Here are some examples of texts narrating the looting of tents and the plundering of women's belongings after the tragic events on the Day of ؑAshuraؑ:

1. *Tarikh al-Tabari*, by Muhammad Tabari; and *Al-Kamil*, by Ibn al-Athir notes that: "People went towards the expensive clothes and camels and plundered them. They rushed towards (the items of

Imam) Husayn and the caravan's belongings – even struggling with women to take their outer garments, and when they overpowered them, they took them.”¹

2. In the book, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, it says: “People went towards the expensive clothes and camels and plundered them. Ruhayl ibn Zuhayr al-Ju‘fi, Jarir ibn Mas‘ud al-Ha‘rami, and Usayd ibn Malik al-Ha‘rami took most of these clothings; and Abu al-Janub al-Ju‘fi took a camel that was used to draw water and named it Husayn! … People were pulling the women’s cloaks off of them, but when Umar ibn Sa‘d forbade them from this act, then they stopped.”²

3. In the book, *Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah*, it has been written, narrating from Humayd ibn Muslim, that: “People divided all of Husayn’s cash and non-cash assets among themselves – even what was in the tent; and (also) the clean [or outer] clothes of the women.”³

4. In the book, *Siyar Alam al-Nubala*, it says: “They plundered Husayn’s belongings. A man took the jewellery from Faima, the daughter of Husayn, but then wept! So Faima asked him: ‘Why are you crying?’ He (the man who was taking the things) replied: ‘How can I not cry when I am plundering the belongings of the Prophet’s daughter?’ So Faima said: ‘Then leave it!’ He responded: ‘I am afraid that someone else will take it!’”⁴

5. In *Al-Amali*, Shaykh aduq writes, narrating from Faima, daughter of Imam Husayn: “The riffraff entered our tent. I was a young girl and had two gold anklets on my feet. A man was pulling the anklets off of my feet and weeping. I asked him: ‘Why are you crying, O enemy of Allah?’ He replied: ‘How can I not cry when I am taking the jewellery of the Prophet’s daughter?’ So I said to him: ‘Then do not take it.’ He answered: ‘I am afraid that someone else will come and take it!’ They plundered everything visible in the tents, and even pulled off the outer garments which we were wearing.”⁵

6. In *Al-Luhuf*, it says: “People rushed to plunder the tents of the Prophet’s family and the light of Zahra’s eyes, to the extent that they even pulled the women’s outer garments off of them. The Prophet’s daughters and Husayn’s wives came out of the tents, crying and wailing together, lamenting the loss of their protectors and loved ones. Humayd ibn Muslim narrates: ‘I saw a woman from Bani Bakr ibn Wail, along with her husband, among Umar ibn Sa‘d’s companions. When she saw people rushing into the tents of the women of Husayn, and taking their belongings, she also took a sword and came towards the tents, and said: ‘O family of Bakr ibn Wail! Are the belongings of the Prophet’s daughters being plundered [and you do nothing about this]?! Authority belongs to no one except Allah. Rise up to avenge the Prophet of Allah!’ However, her husband stopped her and took her back to her place.”⁶

A girl came from the tent of Husayn, so a man said to her: ‘O servant of Allah! Your master has been killed.’ The girl said: ‘I ran screaming towards my ladies, and they stood facing me and cried out …’ The narrator continues: ‘Then they drove the women out of the tents and set the tents on fire. The women ran out barefoot and bareheaded [see note below], plundered and crying, and (were forced to) march like chained captives.”⁷

7. In *Maqta al-Husayn* of al-Khwarizmi, it is written: “The enemies advanced until they surrounded the tents. Shimr ibn Dhil Jawshan was with them. He said: ‘Enter the tents and take their clothes and belongings.’ People entered and took everything in the tents, to the extent that they even took the earrings of Umm Kulthum, Husayn’s sister, and tore her ear. They even forcibly pulled and took the women’s outer garments off.”⁸

8. In the book, *Al-Manaqib*, Ibn Shahr Ashub writes: “Shimr turned towards the tents and they plundered whatever they found, and even Umm Kulthum’s ear was torn from [forcefully taking] an earring.”⁹

9. Shaykh Mufid writes the following in his book, *Al-Irshad*, narrating from Humayd ibn Muslim: “By Allah, I saw them struggling with a woman from Husayn’s wives, daughters, or family, attempting to pull her (outer) clothes off her, and when they overpowered her, they took it.”¹⁰

Note: Regarding this group of narrations, several points should be considered in order to clarify the answer:

1. In the Arabic text of most of these narrations, phrases such as:

جَاءُوا النِّسَاءَ مَلَاحِفَهُنَّ عَنْ ظُهُورِهِنَّ

They pulled the women’s cloaks from their backs.

يَنْزِعُونَ الْمَلَاحِفَ عَنْ ظُهُورِنَا

They are removing the cloaks from our backs.

يَنْتَزِعُونَ مِلَحَفَةَ الْمَرْأَةِ عَنْ ظَهِيرَهَا

They are snatching the woman’s cloak from her back.

تَنَازَعُ ثَوْبَهَا عَلَى ظَاهِرِهِ

Her garment is being pulled off her back.

Considering the meaning of *milhafah* (cloak)¹¹, this does **not** imply that the women were completely uncovered, or that their hair and bodies were exposed. Women at that time wore several layers which covered their hair and body, in addition to outer garments similar to *chadors* or *abyss*. The enemy army took their outer garments, which means they were **not** left without any *hijab*/head covering, nor were

they completely uncovered.

The phrase:

فَخَرَجْنَ حَوَّاسِرٍ مُسَلَّبَاتٍ حَافِيَاتٍ

“They came out bareheaded, plundered, and barefoot.”

In *Al-Luhuf*, by Sayyid Ibn Tawus, he also mentions that this does not mean that the women were naked, or that their hair was visible, but rather they were stripped of their **outer** garments.

Also, the phrase:

تُسْلِبُ الْمَرْأَةُ مِنْ قَنْعَتِهَا مِنْ رَأْسِهَا

The woman’s veil was taken from her head,¹² which has been mentioned in some accounts does not mean that their headscarves were completely removed in a way that their hair was visible.

2. Even if we believe that some or all of their hair was visible for a moment, this does not contradict the status of the Ahl Al-Bayt or the honour of Allah. This is because the type of uncovering that is blameworthy is that which is voluntarily removed or not observed from a person herself, not that which is forcefully removed from a woman. As we know, the women of the *haram* – meaning the group of women who accompanied Imam Husayn in Karbala⁹ – insisted greatly on maintaining their *hijab* in front of non-mahrams, and they were never negligent about their covering and modesty.

1. Tabari, Muhammad ibn Jarir, *Tarikh al-Umam wa al-Muluk* (*Tarikh al-Tabari*), Vol. 5, Pg. 453, Beirut: Dar al-Turath, 2nd edition, 1387 AH.

2. Baladhuri, Ahmad ibn Yahya, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, Vol. 3, Pg. 204, Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1st edition, 1417 AH.

3. Ibn Kathir al-Dimashqi, Isma'il ibn Umar, *Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah*. Vol. 8, Pg. 188, Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1407 AH.

4. Dhahabi, Muhammad ibn Ahmad, *Siyar A'lam al-Nubala*, Vol. 3, Pg. 303, Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risalah, 3rd edition, 1405 AH.

5. Shaykh Raduq, Muhammad ibn Ali, *Al-Amali*. Pp. 164–165, Tehran: Kitabchi, 6th edition, 1417 AH.

6. Sayyid ibn Tawus, *Al-Luhuf fi Qatla al-Tufuf*, Pp. 131–132, Tehran: Nashr-i Jahan, 1st edition, 1389 AH.

7. Sayyid ibn Tawus, *Al-Luhuf fi Qatla al-Tufuf*, Pp. 131–132, Tehran: Nashr-i Jahan, 1st edition, 1389 AH.

8. Khwarazmi, Muwaffaq ibn Ahmad, *Maqtal al-Husayn*, Vol. 2, Pg. 43, Qum: Anwar al-Huda, 2nd edition, 1423 AH.

9. Ibn Shahrashub al-Mazandarani, *Manaqib Al Abi Talib*, Vol. 4, Pg. 112, Qum: Intisharat-i Allamah, 1st edition, 1420 AH

10. Shaykh Mufid, *Al-Irshad fi Ma'rifat HujJaj Allah al-Ilbad*, Vol. 2, Pp. 112–113, Qum: Kungrih-i Shaykh Mufid, 1st edition, 1413 AH.

11. The term *milhafah* (مِلْحَافَة) is defined in Arabic and Persian lexicons as:

1. Arabic: *al-lihaf* (الْلِحَافُ), *al-milhaf* (المِلْحَافُ), or *al-milhafah* (المِلْحَافَةُ): An outer garment worn over other clothing.

2. Persian: *chadar* or *chador* (چادر): an outer garment, *ravandaz* (روانداز): a coverlet, or *milafah* (مِلَافَة): a bedsheet.

Sources:

1. Lughatnamah-i Dikhuda (entry: milhafah).
2. Bustani, Fuṣad Afram and Mihyar, Rīḍa, Farhang-i Abjadi ፩Arabi-Farsi, Pg. 859. Tehran: Intisharat-i Islami, 2nd edition, 1416 AH.
3. Azhari, Muhammad ibn Ahmad, Tahdhib al-Lughah, Vol. 5, Pg. 46. Beirut: Dar Ihya ፩ al-Turath al-፩Arabi, 1st edition, 1421 AH.
4. Ibn Manzur, Lisan al-፩Arab, Vol. 9, Pg. 314, Beirut: Dar ፩adir, 3rd edition, 1414 AH.
5. Ibn Nama al-Hilli, Jaᬁfar ibn Muhammad, Muthir al-Ahzan, Pg. 76, Qum: Madrasat Imam Mahdi (ؑaj), 3rd edition, 1406 AH.
12. Ibn Nama al-Hilli, Jaᬁfar ibn Muhammad, Muthir al-Ahzan, Pg. 76, Madrasat al-Imam al-Mahdi (ؑaj), Qum, 3rd edition, 1406 AH.

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Summary and Conclusion

This article explores the aftermath of the tragedy of Karbala ፩, particularly focusing on the treatment of the women and children from the family of Imam Husayn. It addresses whether their veils and garments were forcibly removed by the enemy army and how this aligns with their dignity and divine honour.

Historical accounts from reliable sources confirm that after the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, the army of ፩Umar ibn Saᬁd looted the belongings of the Ahl Al-Bayt, including their jewellery and outer garments. Narrations describe acts such as pulling cloaks off women's backs and forcibly removing their clothing, but clarify that this did not leave them entirely uncovered. Women at that time wore multiple layers of clothing, including garments that covered their hair and body beneath their outer cloaks, ensuring they were not completely exposed. For example, phrases like "*They pulled the women's cloaks from their backs*", emphasize the removal of outer garments rather than full exposure.

Reports also highlight instances where individual soldiers expressed remorse while plundering items from women and children. Despite this, the overall treatment was brutal, with tents being burned and women being forced to flee barefoot and bareheaded. However, terms like "bareheaded" are interpreted to mean stripped of their outer coverings rather than fully unveiled.

Theologically, it argues that forced uncovering does not diminish the honour or status of the Ahl Al-Bayt. Blameworthy exposure is voluntary; forced actions do not reflect on the victims' dignity or modesty. The women of Imam Husayn's family remained committed to preserving their *hijab* even under extreme duress.

In conclusion, while the events were deeply tragic and humiliating, they did not compromise the spiritual

integrity or divine honour of the Ahl Al-Bayt.

O Allah! Send Your blessings upon

Muhammad and the family of Muhammad!

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