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Article by **Hamid Algar**

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iii. In Islamic Persia

In the Islamic period *čādor*, or *čādar* (lw. in Ar. *šāder*), designates the loose, enveloping, sleeveless outer garment worn by women in Iran in compliance with Islamic regulations on dress (for dialect variations see Doerfer, III, pp. 17-18), called in Arabic *melḥaf* or *melḥafa*. The veiling of women was common in pre-Islamic Iran (see above), and it may be that some of the rigors imposed on them in the early Islamic period—as in 4th/10th century Daylam, where women were allowed to go out only at night, wearing black clothes (Spuler, p. 382)—represented a continuation of pre-Islamic custom.

Islamic requirements that have led to the wearing of the *čādor* derive primarily from Koran 24:31 and 33:59. The first of these two verses stipulates that believing women should not display their ornaments (*zīnatahonna*) to persons other than their husbands, those standing within the forbidden degrees of marriage, and certain other categories, “except what appears thereof” (*ellā mā ẓahara menhā*). Sunni and Shiʿite commentators uniformly list three interpretations for this exception: women’s outer garments; adornments of the face and the hands—kohl, henna, and rings; and the face and the hands themselves. The first interpretation is dismissed as illogical, and the second, supported in Shiʿite *feqh* by numerous sayings of the imams (quoted in Moṭahharī, pp. 132-36), has effectively the same force as the third,

in that display of the ornaments of the face and the hands necessarily involves display of the face and the hands themselves. A minority holds that these, too, must be covered in public but considerations of social utility and necessity (such as the identifiability of a woman participating in legal transactions) are generally held to negate this view (Moṭahharī, pp. 163ff.). Koran 24:31 also calls on women to draw their headcoverings (*ḵomor*, sing. *ḵemār*) over their bosoms (*joyūb*).

Koran 33:59 contains the injunction that women, when venturing outside the home, should draw their outer garments (*jalābīb*, sing, *jelbāb*) around them. The *jelbāb* appears to have been an ample outer garment, covering the head and the torso; it is sometimes defined as synonymous with *melḥafa*, and may therefore be regarded as the ancestor of the present-day *čādor* (Dozy, pp. 122-24).

Basing themselves on Hadith, all schools of *feqh* stipulate that free women who have attained the age of puberty cover their entire bodies while in prayer with the exception of the hands and the face; as a measure of caution, the part of the hands immediately adjoining the wrists and the edge of the face should also be covered (see, for example, Ḵomeynī, *Taḥrīr al-wasīla* I, pp. 142-43). Prepubescent girls and slaves may pray with their heads, hair, and necks uncovered, and there is even a tradition from Jaʿfar al-Ṣādeq forbidding slavewomen to cover their heads while in prayer (*Wasāʾel al-Šīʿa* II/1, p. 299). According to a comment of Imam ʿAlī al-Reżā on Koran 24:61, old women (*mosennāt*)—no age is specified—are not obliged to cover their heads when outside the family circle, but this exception does not apply to prayer (Moṭahharī, p. 158).

As only one of a number of garments assuring conformity with Islamic criteria, the *čādor* has not always had the same form. Literary evidence suggests it may originally have been a face veil or a garment covering the whole body including the face (see the verses from Ferdowsī and Asadī quoted in Dehḵodā, s.v. *čādor*). It appears, too, that the *čādor* may once have been composed of two parts, an upper and a lower, and that it was commonly made of wool (Maẓāherī, p. 94).

Definite information is available about the *čādor* in the Qajar period. It was then that the *čādor*, probably adapted from the covering worn in prayer, as a single, all-enveloping garment for street wear, became uniform garb for Iranian women. One reason for this development was that other items of

traditional female dress—notably the *arḵāleq* (a tunic worn as an outer garment) and the *čāqčūr* (long, wide trousers; q.v.)—were gradually abandoned under the influence of European fashions popularized by the court. Fashionable ladies would cut their *čādor* to be tapered slightly at the waist, but more generally the line of the *čādor* fell straight to the ground, revealing nothing of the body's contours. The *čādor* would sometimes be held together at the waist with a clasp or a tape, a feature that later became lost (Najmī, p. 263). The 13th/19th-century *čādor* was commonly made out of either satin or wool, dyed indigo-blue (Polak, I, p. 161).

This form of *čādor* remained standard outdoor wear for women until prohibited by Reżā Shah on 17 Dey 1315 S./7 January 1936. Government officials whose wives were known to be wearing the *čādor* were dismissed, and women who refused to bare their heads were denied entrance to public places (Wilber, p. 174) and often harassed by the police. This measure led to many women cloistering themselves at home for years and to expressions of concern by the religious scholars over what they saw as an attack on the nation's morality (see, for example, Ḵomeynī, *Kašf al-asrār*, pp. 223-24). After the removal of Reżā Shah in 1320 Š./1941, large numbers of traditionally-minded women resumed wearing the *čādor*.

Women of means from the traditional classes have tended to use two separate *čādor*s: one for outdoor wear, usually dark in color and often made from crêpe de Chine, and another for prayer, lighter in color and kept folded inside a prayer mat or cloth (*jānamāz*). The *čādor* reserved for prayer sometimes has tabs that enable it to be fastened beneath the chin. Poorer women have generally had only one *čādor*, dark in color and fashioned out of heavy material.

With the growth of Islamic activism in the 1340s Š./1960s and 1350s Š./1970s, the *čādor* and the Islamic criteria of dress that underlay it were increasingly extolled as a safeguard both for the dignity and modesty of woman and for the cultural authenticity of society as a whole. As part of the spreading rejection of Western cultural norms, numerous women from non-traditional backgrounds took to wearing the *čādor*, and massive contingents of *čādor*-clad women participated in all the major demonstrations of the Islamic Revolution of 1357 Š./1978-79.

After the victory of the revolution, the covering of the head was gradually made compulsory for all women. A proclamation in the first week of March

1979 by Ayatollah Khomeini that women employees in government ministries ought to observe Islamic criteria of dress marked the first stage of this process. Protest demonstrations by middle- and upper-class women on March 11 and 12 were met with counterdemonstrations by women favoring the *čādor* as well as attacks by government supporters. Later, shopkeepers were called on to refuse service to women not covering their head, and finally, in the spring and summer of 1982, a vigorous campaign to enforce the covering of the head was launched in each locality by the Revolutionary Committees. Roving patrols with discretionary punitive powers were set up to ensure compliance.

It is to be noted, however, that new forms of dress and head-covering seem gradually to be displacing the *čādor*, an inconvenient garment to wear and inefficient in its primary purpose, given its tendency to open unless clasped shut with the hands or clamped with the teeth. Ample headscarves combined with long, loose coats are now very frequently to be seen, as is the *meqnaʿa*, a garment that, falling loosely to the shoulders, encloses the head and the neck while leaving the face open. The *čādor* is, however, still used universally for prayer.

See also HEJĀB

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