

Battle against Burqa Towards Freedom:

Barqa is indeed a sign of oppression of women used by men to subjugate them in the name of religiously and moral obligation

The test of civilization is the estimate of women GW Curtis observes. The barqa is a manifestation of a paranoid and obscurantist mindset that actually demeans the status of a Muslim woman. It is not part of Islamic identity. Rather it symbolizes subjugation and subservience of women folk. The barqa by any other name or form is unacceptable in a liberal modern society which cherishes secularism and gender equality. That a woman in the 21st century should be hidden from view for reasons of modesty or religious belief is both troubling and astonishing. The overwhelmingly patriarchal Muslim society that are not ready to accept women as equals, instigate them to protest their freedom from the veil. Those who advocate the barqa are nothing but male chauvinistic people who subjugate women in the name of religion, piety and moral obligation. Yet, in truth, it does not stand for piety. It stands for political ideology and man dominated hierarchy that imposes this veil on them. To confine Muslim women in a moving tent violates their individually and self-respect while reducing them to non-persons.

There has been a fierce debate raging in Europe over the issue of banning the veil. One after the other, countries across the continent endorse the idea against Muslim women wearing the veils that covers them from head to foot. The French government's decision to ban wearing of the veil in public places, apparent from Sarkozy's declaration in June 2009 that the barqa was not welcome in France is indeed in tune with the changing times. Its lower house the National Assembly, has voted to ban it by an overwhelming margin of 335 to 1. It needs to reiterate that France tries to equal rights for all citizens and the French people support this law. The proposed law is very much in line with the French view of secularism that is based on the strict separation of religion and politics; of course, other European countries are also mulling a ban on the veil. In April 2010, the lower chamber of the Belgian parliament approved an anti-barqa bill and vote by the upper house is awaited to come later this year. Spain, Italy and Netherlands are also trying to seek a ban on the full veil. But the French President deserves applause for banning such rituals that allow a section of clergy to fulfill their political and religious agenda. In public places all French citizens are expected to respect the lofty ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity. When the government applies the same yardstick to all, it is the duty of all citizens to follow the rule, irrespective of cast, creed, race or religion. As pointed out

by Sarkozy, the oppressive garment seek to keep those who were it imprisoned behind a screen. Thus, for women it marks freedom for clutches of patriarchy perpetrated over centuries. Many attribute political and religious motives to the French government's decision to ban the Islamic veil. But one thing is certain. A majority of new generation Muslim women will be happy at the progressive move,

One must remember that the French government's move of banning the niqab has nothing to do with Islam. It is by no means a invasion into the privacy of Muslim women or attempt to curtail their human rights. In fact, facial veil is the result of a wrong notion created by some sections of the hypocrite clergy through a misrepresentation of the holy Koran. Inarguably, injunction to preserve the chastity of women are found in almost all religious. But our holy scriptures only show the way by laying down basic principles. Some vested interests who have made a fetish of them by political manipulation and male- only interpretation of Quaran speak of their backward looking religious or political agenda. Their argument have no basis as the face is not part of the Islamic veil. In the changing times when women have breaking the glass ceiling and come out of their homes, their dress code would obviously undergo change as per the exigencies of circumstances. This partly explains the result if the recent polls which have indicated more than 80 percent of the French citizens, including Muslims, would like a law banning barqa. Some 71 percent of Germans, 62 percent Britons and 59 percent Spaniards also supported the barrqa ban. The interior ministry estimates that 2000 out of a total French population of 65 million of which 5 million are Muslims, were barqa. It is time secular Muslims, grew beyond their obsession of religion.

Those who argue to counter the "ban veil" propaganda completely miss the fact that security requires people to show their faces when appearing in public places. The barqa poses serious safety problems at the time. When the entire world is grappling with terrorism. Many worry that the veil will terrorists to evade security at airports or provide camouflage to bank robbers. Also in a civil society the identity of a person should be visible to everyone and the offensive piece of cloth definitely hinders the free flow of communication. So why should Muslim women be deprived of free social interaction? Some professionals like doctors, nurses teachers and police officers need contact with their clients or public. There is also a assumption that Muslim women wear barqa as result of coercion. Besides being a symbol of male domination, the veil is unhealthy and has a deteriorating effect on the constitution of Muslim women. There are also some reports that many women wear it because of the fear of attack by Islamic militants. How can we say then that "barqa" represents "freedom of chice"?

Last but not the least, to provide dignity and freedom to Muslim women, more thoughtful approach rather than the ban is needed. They need to speak out against all kinds of oppression heaped on them in the name of religion. Of course, the Muslim patriarchy supports them when they demonstrate against such issue like barqa ban, but where do the mullqabs go when a husband throws a wife out of his house by uttering talaq thrice? Why do not medievalists agitate against polygamy o0r child marriage? If legislators really want to help Muslim women, they could begin by taking cudgels on their behalf against the gender

bias that makes life difficult for them in traditional societies. Muslim women on their part need to recognize that unless they shun blind faith there is no hope for them to claim their legitimate Islamic rights.

Nations remains above religion in a secular country. But this is not the case with India even with the emphasizes equal treatment to all religious and denies patronage to any one faith. Given the fact that, Sirin Middy, a 24-year-old teacher's of West Bengal's first Muslim University was not able to hold classes for more than thr5ee months because of student unions diktat to wear a barqa, it is high time that India too considered imposing a similar ban. France could be a torchbearer for countries like India which compromise on security for the sake of religion.

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