

# [H in the seventies, the views of some](https://assignbuster.com/h-in-the-seventies-the-views-of-some/)

h CenturyIntroduction.. so much energy has been expended by Muslim menand then Muslim women to remove the veil and byothers to affirm or restore it ..

(Ahmed 167). This paper explores these efforts in two specific stages: the first and the lastthirds of the twentieth century. Through an analysis of some of the variousarguments on the veil, I will try to induce some general characteristics of thedebate on the issue and on women during these two specific periods of time. The starting point will be Kasim Amin’s Tahrir el Mara’a (Liberation ofWoman) and the counter argument of Talat Harb’s Tarbiet el Mara’a walHijab, (Educating Women and the Veil). The debate between those twoprotagonists which has become a prototype of the debate on the veilthroughout the century (Ahmed P. 164). Malak Hefni Nassif’s and HodaSha’arawi’s attitudes towards the veil represent an interesting insight to twodifferent interpretations of the hijab issue by feminist activists that prevailthroughout the century.

The whole synthesis of this early debate is then putin juxtaposition to the debate later in the century as represented by theavalanche of literature on the topic in the seventies, the views of somefamous sheikhs like Mohammed Metwally el Shaarawi and others, and theheated debate initiated by the Minister of Education’s decree of 1994 toprevent school administrations from imposing the hijab on girls as part of theuniform. The Early DebateKasim Amin’s Tahrir El-Mara’a (Published 1899)It may not be an exaggeration to say that Amin’s Tahrir al-Mara’a was oneof the most controversial book in Egypt’s modern history. It has ignited astrong debate and prompted more than thirty reaction articles and bookseither to defy or assert his argument against the veil (Ahmed P. 164). The ideas of the book were not totally new, they echoed the writings of somewriters like Mariam al-Nahhas (1856-1888), Zaynab Fawwaz (1860-1914), Aisha al-Taymuriah (1840-1902), and Murqus Fahmi’s (a Coptic lawyer)four act play Al Mar’ah fi al-Sharq or (The Woman in the East) (Badran P.

19). Yet, Amin’s book double-scored for coming from a Muslim judge andfor his overt proposal to unveiling women’s faces. His words were not theonly challenge to the existing notions of the hijab, it was his caliber as aMoslim judge that has vocalized his call to unveil women and gave his bookimportance. After an introduction loaded with emotional phrases on the degradation of theEgyptian woman and an exaltation of the European woman, the book isdivided into four sections: Educating women, Women’s veil, Thewoman and the nation, and Marriage and divorce. Amin starts his argument calling for the Hijab Shara’ei stating that theHijab in its form then (covering the face, the hair and the whole body) wasnot mandated by the Shari’aa. He further adds that he was not calling for theextreme of the West which makes the woman liable to seduction (AminP.

65). The argument against the veil is in two sections: The religious sectionwhich is mainly text interpretation and some Hadith that prompt women tocover the hair and the whole body except for the hands and the face; and thesocial (practical / everyday life) perspective. The later section includessocial ideas such as the inconvenience for women with their faces coveredto dwell in business, to testify in courts or to get engaged (as the groomshould see her face first). Furthermore, he argues that unveiling would makewomen watch their behaviors as they could be recognized and hence theirreputation would be at stake if they did any wrong. Still, from the practicalsocial point of view, the flimsy bourqo’ (face cover) used was moretempting as it makes the viewer curious to see what was intended to behidden.

He further argues that, if women are imprisoned in the hareem (partof the house where women are secluded), then even if they did not commitany shameful act, it would not be due to any virtue in them, but to the factthat they did not have the freedom to do otherwise. Amin accuses the veil of being a barrier to women’s development andeducation (P. 85), arguing that it deprived her from interacting with thesociety and learning how to live. He illustrates by comparing the ignorantpeasant with the elite urban lady who can speak French and plays the piano, and concludes that the ignorat peasant would be