

ELHAM RAHMATI – QUESTIONS FOR AUNTS, ENGLISH CAPTIONS

So, shall we start?

Should we get up and go back to the set now?

No, never mind.

Already tired?

My mom's gonna get bored and leave any minute.

00:01:00,760

Stop picking on my sister!

Okay, now...

The first question is for my mom.

I want us to begin from the Revolution.

At the time of the Revolution, you were 19.

Wearing hijab was a conscious choice for you
—no one had forced you.

What made you come to this decision?

00:01:35

We were a religious family and followed certain
practices,
like prayer and fasting.

But my father and the family in general

weren't strict about hijab.

Right before the Revolution and my graduation,
I began reading Ali Shariati.

We were also participating in
religious gatherings in the neighborhood.

These led a few classmates and me to choose
hijab.

To dress more modestly and wear headscarves.

When I started university,
hijab wasn't mandatory yet.

Some wore it; some didn't.
If someone wore hijab it was by choice,
not coercion

00:02:44,480

The way we dressed kept changing with time.

I entered university right before
the Cultural Revolution closed it.

After the universities reopened,
I began wearing the chador.

But over time, societal shifts
changed my view of the chador.

Mom, what were those societal shifts?

I noticed rising social pressures

–behaviors framed as religious–

that clashed with the progressive Islam of Ali Shariati, which I admired.

I realized hijab isn't just the chador. We thought the Cultural Revolution was about changing course content–

removing Western influences and decolonizing education.

But that wasn't the case.

It seemed aimed at eliminating certain groups from universities.

34

00:03:51

Before, all religious and secular groups were active and thriving.

35

00:03:58,800 --> 00:04:04,320

But afterward, professors were purged, students imprisoned...

The university environment became completely closed off.

It became all about coursework–no more political activity.

In the years that followed, I became a schoolteacher.

Wearing the chador was mandatory at work,
so we complied.

But I could see the pressure
that was on teachers and students.

Performance reviews depended on whether
we prayed or wore the chador.

I found these practices unacceptable—
they only fueled social hypocrisy.

Many advanced careers by appearing religious
—even if they didn't believe in it.

Those who truly believed did so sincerely,
but the pressure and hypocrisy pushed many
away.

I think many young people turned away
from hijab and Islam, -

because society's outward appearance didn't
reflect its inner reality, and everyone could see
that.

Shortly after the Revolution's victory,
Khomeini abolished the Family Protection Law.

He then introduces and imposes
the mandatory hijab law.

On March 3, 1979,
around 8000 women marched in protest.

Do you remember this at all?

00:05:48

I had heard such a movement existed.

I was only 19 then,
shaped by the religious zeal of the new state.

We didn't really think about democracy
or respecting others' opinions.

I knew of protests happening,
but I didn't have an opinion about them.

I didn't agree or disagree.
I felt neutral about it.

Elham (off-screen): So, who did you want
liberation for?
Just yourself?

You must understand—the situation then
was such that when we wanted to join protests,—

We'd look for a black chador to wear,
to blend with the other protesters.

The Revolution and the Iraqi invasion of Iran
happened just two years apart.

At the time, people weren't
that focused on hijab.

Religious folks accepted it without question.

Those against it had other urgent worries.

Then the 8-year war began,
with hardships, martyrs, and airstrikes.

Hijab wasn't a main concern back then,
as it is now.

Elham, hearing what Mahnaz and Behnaz said
earlier—

reminded me of a happy childhood memory
that got me interested in hijab.

00:07:35

It was just before the Revolution,
I was in third grade.

Mom used to take us to Quran sessions.

On our return, she'd be noticeably kinder.

She disliked snacks like chips or popcorn,
preferred us eating fruit and home-cooked
meals.

But after those sessions, she'd give us money,
and we'd buy the snacks we craved.

Her kindness after those sessions
and how gentle she became—

sparked my interest in religion, the Quran,
and the hijabi women there.

(joking) You liked the snacks, not the religion.

I was influenced by my religious high schools—
I went to two of them.

One was a semi-private school,
where the faculty genuinely talked to us about
Islam.

They wanted to show us its compassionate side.

00:08:46

Once inside the school,
we were allowed to dress more comfortably.

In 13 years of school, just that one year
let me skip the headscarf in P.E.

I initially avoided the chador outside,
yet the school inspired me to choose wearing it.

Later, in therapy, I realized that
part of that choice was tied to my adolescence—
a time when teens seeks approval from society,
and especially from their father.

You know, our father wasn't the type
to offer validation or encouragement.

He was always critical.

Even if you did something wonderful,
he wouldn't offer praise.

I've often wondered why I first wore the chador,
and why I stopped.

I realized the eight years I wore the chador
spanned my transition to adulthood.

A time of forming my independent identity.

I yearned for approval from both my father and
society,
but it never came.

00:10:16

You probably remember me from that time -

When I was 14, I was thrown into a pool,
and I didn't know how to swim.

As I sank, I held my scarf tight,
hoping keeping it showed I was a 'good girl'.

How else would I be validated by family or
society?

In the period I wore the chador-

a relative, whose daughters didn't wear hijab,
looked at me wistfully and said-

"I wish my daughters were like you and wore
hijab."

I got really confused and upset.
Is being a good girl only about wearing hijab?

I said, 'Your daughters aren't bad girls;
they just don't want to wear hijab.'

Why is a girl's virtue measured
by whether she wears the hijab?

This became a reason I later gave up the chador.

It was hard;
taking off the chador felt like walking naked.

Even though I was wearing
a long overshirt and headscarf.

I didn't want to be judged or defined by my
outfit.

Elham, you said we could ask you questions.

I have a question about the 'Jin, Jian, Azadi'
movement.
But first a side note...

When the movement began in 2022, I was
thrilled.

I thought a new era was coming to address
women's long-standing anger at Iran's unfair
laws.

Especially against women who've sacrificed
most and
shown the most empathy to men.

And yet endured the most hardships.

I hoped the movement would demand laws
dignifying women;
Offering them legal and financial support.

But on social media, outrage focused on the
hijab law and issues like women in stadiums or
riding motorcycles.

This was driving me insane!

With women's rights in such a catastrophic state,
how can cycling be a priority?

I'm not for or against cycling.

I mean I just wanted real change for women
broken by courts and injustice in all these years.

Women cheated on or left for second wives
by awful men shielded by the law.

I wanted change for them, but it didn't come.
I was disheartened that it became all about the
hijab—

and handling that in the most
unrestrained way from the outset.

It felt many supporting the movement
were out of touch and lost in fantasies.

I ask, have the 'Jin, Jîyan, Azadî' supporters
thought about the movement's end goal?

If we agree 'hijab is a choice',

and that results in promiscuity, how will they address that?

Aunt Naazi, to grasp 'Jin, Jîyan, Azadî', we must consider its origins and ideological foundation.

00:14:25

This slogan comes from Kurdistan. It's fundamentally a struggle against patriarchy, not just mandatory hijab.

Yes, but what have we seen in practice?

They now even call it the 'Anti-Hijab Movement.'

The last officially permitted protest against the government's actions was on June 14, 2009.

Since then, protests have been suppressed and permits denied.

Naazi (off-screen): This happens to all movements.

People still defy norms for their convictions.

Look! Protests get posted online, calling people to places like Inqilab Square at specific times.

The state militarizes the square from days before and after, so nobody raises a voice.

Naazi: How did the Revolution succeed?
People resisted.

Mehri (Off-screen):
Speak logically!

There's only so much one can sacrifice
to achieve something.

I can't risk my life as the price
for changing these laws.

I already did that in 2009 Green Movement.
I was in the streets.

– Should we be content now with not wearing
hijab?

– Hold on! Let me finish!

You say why they didn't keep on protesting.
Think about what rallying entails...

It's people forming a rally around a shared
struggle,
which always triggers a planned crackdown.

But women going out without hijab in their
neighborhoods,
the state can't monitor all of them.

There's a well-known saying:
Each of us fights for what we lack most.

You talk about women's rights because you're
55–
it matters to you, your friends, and women your
age.

and that's completely valid.

But how much have 'you' fought for this right?
How much effort have 'you' made
to raise awareness among your friends?

I'm not telling you to go protest
outside the Parliament.

Do what you can in your circle—
help your friends see what's possible.

Naazi: Your friends are easy to reach;
mine are all devout and academic.

Mehri (Off-screen):
Don't religious people want equal rights?

My point: Why did those who began 'Jin, Jiyan,
Azadî'
trivialize it to focus only on hijab?

Mehri (Off-screen): Because that's the only
visible achievement we have right now.

Don't you think protests backed by state
supporters
are more likely to be heard?

00:17:14

Naazi (Off-screen): Yes, if they ever show up ...

I've said many things at great cost,
since I was a high school Islamic Studies
teacher—

I raised these issues at the Education Department,
where no one else dared speak.

I talked with officials from
the Islamic Propagation Organisation.

I sat down with education officials and
criticized their narrow-minded views.

I said, 'fine, you want to reduce the dowry
and strip away legal protections for women?

At least build cultural awareness!
Teach men to respect women—do the
groundwork!

Look! When women lack basic rights,
unable even to decide what to wear.

When I don't even have this,
how can I even think about demanding equality?

Naazi (Off-screen):
Now that you've gained this right!

(Together):
Not yet! It's still a mandatory law!

Naazi: But they don't arrest
women in the streets anymore?

(Together): Who says so?
Your own nieces have been arrested!

Naazi: But women are walking without hijab everywhere...

Maryam:
You know why that happens?

This is my limit in this struggle.
I get warnings and face consequences.

You think it's easy for me to walk out without hijab?

No! Especially, when I go to the main squares in the city without hijab, I get tense.

Naazi: If they arrested everyone, the prisons would be full.

(Together): If they could, they would!

In the era of the morality police they arrested so many women.

00:18:53

Naazi, you say your friends are like you; ours get arrested.

Let me tell you from my experience, both pre- and post-Revolution.

I think women are society's most oppressed. First women, then the youth.

They really are victims.

Why do I say that?

Shariati's 'Fatima is Fatima' introduced Fatima to me as a role model, it made me proud to be a woman.

But his books are banned in schools and libraries,
and his ideas ignored.

Then I see a government in power
with the worst views about women.

It values women who are completely obedient.

Ironically, the top officials' own daughters and wives
enjoy the best opportunities.

If their daughters have a bad marriage,
divorce is granted in seconds.

They don't face the same struggles.
Others suffer the discrimination.

When the 'Jin, Jiyan, Azadî' movement began,
I joined every rally.

I believed they were fighting oppression,
so I supported them.

But later, I saw that in these rallies,
no one talks about people's real demands.

Back in the Revolution, groups like the Fedaiyan

and Communists chanted 'Bread, Housing, Freedom'.

Watching closely, I saw no economic or cultural agendas in this movement.

If I were in power, I'd have made hijab optional. Who do we want to fool?

This demand exists in society.

Do you still see traces of the ideals of the Revolution?

The ideals were good, but they got off track.

Mehri (Off-screen):
Its slogans were good.

Even now, when some glorify Reza Shah or the crown prince, it annoys me.
The monarchy was oppressive too!

During the Revolution,
we marched to free political prisoners.

I'll never forget we carried a prisoner's body whose skull had been drilled.

Just because these ones are bad doesn't mean the old ones were good. Oppression is oppression!

00:21:38

I support protests for Gaza.
They're about standing up for the oppressed.

Islam teaches us,
'Not opposing injustice makes you complicit.'

We—including me, Behnaz, an ordinary
housewife—
we see things in black and white.

We either glorify something or vilify it.

I posted online about the genocide in Gaza
I thought the tragedy is evident to all.

I got so much hate:
'You've become one of them! You're supporting
the state!'

But where is the connection?

Knocking off a seminary student's turban
in the street or even beating him,—

how is that revolutionary?
How are we different than them?

It's not virtue that stops us from oppressing
others
— it's lack of opportunity.

He has chosen to
become a seminary student.

Why should I hit him?

Save your rage for the ones
who caused this mess.

I've done everything I could:
joined protests, suffered beatings and tear gas.

Even now, I still go.
But as long as its run by reason, not impulse.

Grandma, what do you think?

About what?

All we've said so far.

I don't really know much about politics.

00:23:39

How do you feel about how we dress?
We're all different. Does it upset you?

It depends on what you want.
I have my beliefs, and you have yours.

Bravo!

Mom, do you say the same thing
behind our back?

Naazi wants to know if you complain behind our
back,
for example about me removing my hijab.

Naazi wants to know if you complain behind our back,
for example about me removing my hijab.

Yeah, I do say that.

Then why now you say
everyone is free to do what they want?

No one listens to me,
so I have to say it like that.

No forcing in our family—
just gossip and social pressure.

Exactly! When I took off my hijab after the 2022
movement,
no one in our family confronted me.

Even Naazi, who's religious,
invited me over knowing I'd come without it.

I even asked her,
“Is it okay if I come like this?”

She said, “Of course.
You know what's best. Come.”

Our family accepts people's differences.
You don't get disinvited for not wearing hijab.

But in my husband's family, that did happen.
They said,
“If you want to come to our house, you need to
wear hijab.”

Until the Jina uprising, even till last year,
I still wore hijab and had no problem with it.

I accepted that people have
different views and choices about it.

After the movement
I made a pact with myself.

That if the law changed and hijab became
optional,
I'd still wear mine, the way I liked.

But if I felt it was being used as a weapon,
as a political measuring stick, then I'd take mine
off.

Just to make sure our side
doesn't get weakened.

And so, when the tensions rised last year,
I took my hijab off.

Elham (off-screen):
It was a political decision for you?

00:26:04
Yes, it was a political decision.

If I had to choose between an Islamic or secular
state,
I'd choose Islamic. No doubt.

Even if it damages
the integrity of religion itself?

Mehri (off-screen):
Even if they rule unjustly?

Injustice happens in a secular state too.

There are things you choose to ignore,
and that's really a pity.

You ignore the devastating 8-year war imposed
on a newly formed government.

– It's been 30 years since the war!

(Elham) The war came right after the Revolution,
it affected the state's formation.

(Mehri) The state had Shah's wealth.
It was well-armed, that's how they survived the
war.

Naazi (off-screen): We were poorly equipped,
that's why it turned into a war of attrition.

(Mehri) No, that applied only in the final years.
(Naazi) If Shah had left us arms,
the war wouldn't have lasted so long.

Maryam, was women's decision to remove the
hijab
just waiting for a spark to happen?

Or no, this was bound to happen

sooner or later?

I remember, shortly before
Mahsa (Jina) Amini's case,

A diaspora activist called on women
to go out unveiled on "Hijab and Modesty Day."

That day was the first time
I left work without hijab.

Not because I believe in or follow this activist—
but just because it was a symbolic act.

That day, for the first time,
I walked from office to home without hijab.

On the way, I saw a few girls
with their scarves around their necks.

Seeing each other, we smiled,
showed the victory sign, and walked on.

There were only a few of us,
yet the sense of solidarity was powerful.

You think you're alone, but seeing someone else,
that glance, that victory sign, fuels you to keep
going.

Then the lifelong fear melts away.
That sense of being watched, like Big Brother in
1984.

And that's when you can finally breathe.

We think we're the start or end of history—
but really, we're just part of a larger flux.

The Gen Z may chart their own course,
but before them—the 40s, 50s, 60s—

each generation, in its own right,
has helped steer this river to where it flows
today.

Who knows if this movement or any movement
will succeed this year, in five years, or in ten?

But the more we grow,
the more we become mature of thought,—

the more adept we'll be at guiding
that river toward a steadier path.

Politics aside—

Elham, what's your own personal opinion on
hijab?

— Say it again, auntie?

(Together): Storm is coming.

Look at how the carpet is moving!

The divine wrath is upon us!