

## ‘Where to Draw a Line’

By Riyaz Ibrahim

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*All praise belongs to Allāh, and may the choicest salutations and blessings be upon the Final Prophet, Muḥammad ibn Abdillāh and his family, as is the right of blessings to be invoked upon them.*

The content of this article was produced after a questioner enquired about the Islamic ruling on trimming and shaping eyebrows. I have, therefore, decided that it be circulated for the benefit of the wider community.

The trend for trimmed eyebrows has made its way from the celebrity circle all the way to Muslim households. Yes! A demand for statement eyebrows has meant that our Muslim sisters, AND mothers – as age is no barrier here – either through ignorance or knowingly, demand the ‘catwalk’ look without any regard for the beautiful teachings of Islam. Whether it’s the perfectly sculpted or the softly defined brows, fashioned to frame the eyes, little respect is afforded to the sacred texts and the ruling derived thereof.

Shaping or removing the hair of the eyebrows is prohibited from the definitive text (*al-naṣṣ al-qat’ī*).

From the *ḥadīth* narrated by Sayyidunā ‘Alqamah رضي الله عنه, we come to know that the Messenger of Allāh صلى الله عليه وسلم has cursed the tattooer, tattooed, those who pluck the eyebrows, those who have their eyebrows plucked and those who create spaces between their teeth, artificially, to seek adornment. Such women have changed what Allāh has created, according to the *ḥadīths* in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Muslim*, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and *Sunan al-Nasā’ī*.

Explaining the term *nāmiṣah*, in *Baḥr al-Rā’iq* - commentary of *Kanz al-Daqā’iq*, Allāmah ibn Nujaym رحمته الله writes, ‘*Nāmiṣah* is that woman who trims the eyebrow in order to beautify it, and *mutanamiṣah* is the woman who has it [trimming] done to her.’ Imām Abū Dāwūd رحمته الله is also of a similar view.

Thus, those who have their eyebrows plucked and those who pluck eyebrows for others fall under the category of those who change what Allāh has created and deform its designs.

In another *ḥadīth*, Sayyidunā ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd رضي الله عنه says, ‘I heard the Messenger of Allāh صلى الله عليه وسلم forbidding the removal of [facial and eyebrow] hair except when there is a defect.’ (*Musnad Aḥmad*)

‘Allāmah ibn ‘Ābidīn Shāmī ﷺ commentates, ‘...but this (ruling of prohibition) will be applied in cases where it (removing hair) is not a necessity.’ (*Radd al-Muḥtār*)

While serving a stern reprimand to those who shape, pluck or fashion their eyebrows beyond what is allowed, the *ḥadīths*, in line with the legal texts, highlight where to draw a line (no pun intended), i.e. the intention should be to bring normality to the eyebrows if they have taken a defect form and not only to beautify.

Since there is clear prohibition in the *ḥadīths* regarding the removal of hair from the eyebrows, the Pure Sharī‘ah allows for no extra dispensations or concessions, such as allowing it for the husband, to be given in this matter.

Removal of hair for adornment (for the husband) is concerning hair that grows in places where it is seen as unnatural and unsightly (including stray hairs of eyebrows), such as the face, i.e. cheek, above and below lips, legs etc. In fact, it is praiseworthy to do so as explained by Imām Nawawī ﷺ among others and through the *ḥadīths* of Sayyidah ‘Ā’ishah ﷺ.

Also take note that the *ḥadīths* of Sayyidah ‘Ā’ishah ﷺ on this matter permit removing only ‘what is unsightly’ and does not permit plucking hair in excess of what is required.

That which is allowed from the category of ‘adornment’ only for the husband falls within a set of actions that are allowed and permissible (albeit conditionally) and does not have a definitive text cursing those who perpetrate them - as there is an important jurisprudential maxim that states: ‘There is no cursing upon acts which are permissible [unless there is a proof of the opposite or proof for that act to be permissible in other circumstances];’ for example, we know through the *ḥadīths* that a woman who displays her beauty in the midst of strangers is cursed but praised when she does so before her husband. On the contrary, there is no clear proof (other than opinions) suggesting that the eyebrows could be shaped or trimmed for the husband’s sake.

Another problem in accepting the view of those who permit married women to ‘slightly’ neatened their eyebrows for their husbands is that they are a more permanent fixture of a woman when compared to make up, which can be washed off before leaving the home to be in view of strangers. One should also bear in mind that the size of eyebrows mirrors the ever-changing public attitude and perceptions of what is considered perfect, thin or normal, thus even those women who have perfectly normal eyebrows sometimes begin to think that they are out of shape and feel the need to pluck them, ultimately ending up plucking without a need or plucking more than they ought to as a consequence.

There is no doubt that the few texts comprising of opinions that allow the plucking of eyebrows 'slightly' for the husband are, in comparison to the definitive text, very weak. A fragile position cannot be used to pass a ruling when a clear proof of prohibition from the *Qur'ān* or *ḥadīth* exists. To reconcile the meanings of the *ḥadīths* of Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah رضي الله عنها and the *ḥadīths* where such women are accursed, scholars of the Ḥanafī School of Thought state that the removal of hair from the eyebrows is allowed under the following conditions:

- (a) The eyebrows have become linked above the nose.
- (b) Eyebrows have become so bushy that they appear abnormal.
- (c) They have grown extra long.

Muftī Rashīd Ludhyānwī رحمته الله writes, 'If the eyebrows have spread excessively, then it is permissible to bring them back to a more normal state.' (*Aḥsan al-Fatāwā*)

In relation to the viewpoint that one is allowed to trim only so much that it does not resemble eunuchs, jurists explaining the text state that this is only when a person appears disfigured or the eyebrows have grown out of place and not in normal circumstances.

In conclusion, removal of facial hair for women is allowed (because of exceptions made by jurists in light of other *ḥadīths* which are unanimously agreed upon) with the exception of the eyebrows since there is an explicit reference made to its impermissibility in other *ḥadīths*. But, if the eyebrows have taken a defective form, they can be set by carefully removing only what is undoubtedly overgrown or unsightly to give it a more natural look and eliminate the flawed appearance. Removing anything beyond that would be impermissible for both married and unmarried women.