

Cultural Barriers to Girls' Education

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Abstract:

This study "Cultural Barriers to Girls Education" shows local perception of parents regarding their daughters' education. In spite of the fact that the people are aware of the importance of literacy, there is a gender gap. People are still reluctant to send their daughters to the schools. There are certain cultural barriers to girls' education which helps to maintain the status quo. The pardah has been a major barrier for the girls' education since a long time. The other barriers include division of labour, male decision makers, nonparticipation in economic activities, temporary family membership, and inheritance. Fathers belonging to different classes and age groups have their own reasons for not sending their daughters to school. The group of fathers aging more than 60 years was more concerned about pardah whereas the group between 20 to 40 years had economic reasons. Mothers have slightly different opinion about female education. They have their own reasons for not sending their daughters to school. The pattern of change among males and females was almost similar. In younger groups, both of them were more concerned for economic reasons. So with the passage of time the reasons have been shifted from pardah to economy which includes nonparticipation in economic activities, investment on temporary family member and the inheritance. This research was conducted in Villag Dasuha District Faisalabad.

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Qualitative anthropological techniques were used to collect empirical data.

Key words: Pardah, Division of labour, Economic activities, Decision making, Mobility, Inheritance, Barrier, Patriarchal and Partilineal.

Introduction

According to the 1998 Census literacy rate in Pakistan is 45% with males comprising 56.5% and females 32.6%. At the urban area's literacy rate is 64.70%, while in rural areas it is 34.40%. Only 20.80% females in rural areas are literate in Pakistan. According to a UNESCO report on Literacy Trends and Statistics (2002), "A comparison between the urban and rural population of Pakistan and between males and females reveals that the rural literacy rate (34.4%) is less than that, urban (64.70%) and female literacy rate (32.6%) is less than male (56.5%)." The low female literacy rate especially in the rural areas creates many problems for the females themselves as well as for the society. Being half of the population of the country, women cannot play their effective role in national development due to low literacy level. While talking about low literacy rate Ghafoor (1994) says, "In most of the villages of Pakistan female literacy rate is low, in spite of the fact that Government has taken several measures and suggested much for the improvement of literacy rate in the villages. Education is necessary for both male and female children without any discrimination."

It is considered very bad in the village to seek girl's consent to her marriage. The girl who herself talks in favour or against her marriage or groom is considered *bayghairat* (shameless). People don't tolerate others talking about their daughters, sisters, wives or even mothers. It is considered as a sin for the girls to come in front of strangers without *pardah*. It is believed that boys are the rulers while girls have to serve their families, including parents, brothers, in-laws, husband

and children. Girls are expected to be experts in their household chores. About sons, most of the people said that they are important because they earn money and support family, while daughters are somebody else's property. Girls are also desired to be obedient and tolerant being concerned with honour/repute of their families. The discrimination against girls is quite obvious as they are considered as some material thing or possession, which is to be handed over to others.

People get worried about the birth of a girl because she is a very big responsibility for the family as the family's honour has to be protected (referring to their chastity/virginity and so the honour of the family) and she has to be married for which a lot of money is required. The Son is considered as the guardian of the house. He stands for the symbol of a family's strength. Subsequently, they also earn money and support their family. Daughters, on the other hand, are taken as a symbol of family's weakness. Sons are preferred because they bring wives and are the lineage bearers; daughter, however, goes as a wife to somebody else's house. Thus, the natives think that investing more on their girls' education is of no use for them as some other family gets the benefit.

Changes took place in attitudes and educational systems for both boys and girls during the last three decades and their impact on the social structure is also visible. However, certain barriers are still created for girls' education to maintain the status quo.

Locale of Study

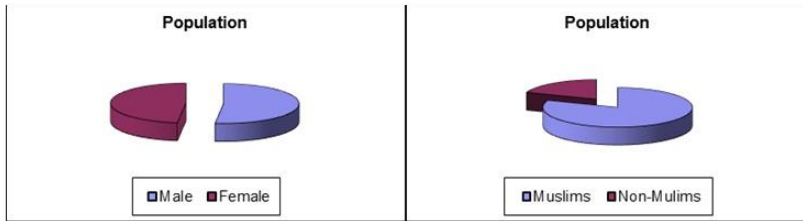
This study was conducted in Village Dasuha (242-R.B.), District Faisalabad. The village is situated at a distance of 15 km from Faisalabad city in South West direction and 2 km from Samundri road from where a branch road leads to the village. According to 1998 population census report of district Faisalabad the total population of Dasuha is 9,557, which

includes 4952 males and 4605 females. This total figure includes 7721 Muslims and 1838 Non-Muslims.

Table 1: Population of the Village

Total Population	Male	Female	Muslim	Non-muslim
9557	4952	4605	7721	1838

Figure 1: Population of the Village



Research Methodology

During our research, we use simple random sampling for socioeconomic survey. One hundred households were selected for this purpose. Before starting the interviews we stayed in the village, visited and communicated with people for the first week of our research for the establishment of rapport which is usually the primary and crucial step in anthropological research. It is the way and manner in which the researcher enters the community and develops contacts with the community members. During this first week of our rapport building we choose two key informants in the village on our personal judgment basis, which knew most of the people in the village and their socioeconomic conditions. We used participant observation in order to get a first hand and accurate information about the sampled families. In addition, we participated in the daily activities of women and girls. Moreover, we attended the ceremonies like marriages and engagements, etc. Unstructured interviews were conducted with the elder members of society such as mothers, grandmothers, and maternal/paternal aunts, of the students.

This is an informal and comparatively less restricting way of extracting information from the interviewees. Structured Interviews were used to interview the teachers of different schools, both for girls and boys and other government/non-governmental officials. The reason for this was that these people tended to take the interview more seriously and give reasonably accurate answers. Another reason for its use was that we did not have an informal relationship with them. The questionnaires were used while conducting the interviews with them. The questions that formed our questionnaire were simple, direct and open-ended since these were self-administered questionnaires. Case study method was also used during our research to get detailed data related to some sequence of event or set of events to draw some theoretical conclusions. The individual case studies conducted in the village were formulated on the pattern of multiple case-designs. These case studies were conducted to trace gender biases existing in family regarding education.

Results and Discussion

In Pakistani society, generally parents discriminate between male and female children and have created different barriers to female education. They prefer sons to daughters, considering them as helping hands in the family. Parents believe that whatever they are spending on sons is an investment worth a return, whereas spending on the daughters is wastage because they are considered as liabilities. Traditionally, parents do not depend upon daughters. Thus, there is no financial benefit for parents to educate them. Preferences are different for boys and girls in respect of education due to certain reasons. Girls were generally believed as more obedient than boys. Boys, on the other hand, were expected to be naughty and that they could speak as loud as they wanted. Nobody could correct them except their fathers and elder brothers. A number of the informants believed that girls are more responsible than boys,

soft natured and weaker while boys are hard tempered. The following are the major cultural barriers to girls' education.

Pardah: Most of the women in the village observe *pardah*. Neither they face strangers, nor do they go out of the house alone. So *pardah* is a major barrier for the girls' education. The majority of the natives does not send their girls to higher schools and colleges due to strict observance of *pardah*. The girls are not allowed to go outside the house alone. Even the families who are moderate and do not observe *pardah* very keenly hesitate to send their girls out for education, fearing a group of eve teasers might harm them. They create stories to scandalize them. This type of stories or remarks damages the girls' reputation in the locality, which can affect even their marriages. People, thus, were found reluctant in sending their daughters out for getting secondary and higher secondary education.

Division of Labour: There is no balance of work between males and females, especially in the school going age. At this age boys have very little to do. They have a lot of free time for their studies. On the other hand, girls of the same age have to do a lot of work at home. They have to help their mothers in almost every household work. In most of the households they take care of the sibilings. On the other hand, the boy's responsibility is usually limited to bring grocery, etc. After that he is free from all household responsibilities and can spend the rest of the time in studies, with friends, listening songs or resting in his room. When he needs anything, he orders his sister and demand is fulfilled. The males get the Sunday as an off day, but there is no such relief for the females. It is ironical that all this hard work by a girl goes unnoticed, unacknowledged, and unearned. This imbalance is another barrier in girls' education.

Male Decision Makers: Males are considered as a decision maker regarding the females' education. Normally, they decide the level of education for their daughters or sisters. Most of the females in the village discontinue their education at primary level. Whenever a question regarding the decision making power was asked from females, they said, "Obviously males and it is their right. They go out of the homes, have interaction with the people and have a better vision, so they can make better decisions. The males fear that if a female gets an education, she will start interfering in the decision making process, which is so far males' domain. They do not like any interference in their domain, so they keep the females less educated." However, the majority of the males has reported lack of interest of their females towards education as the reason for such decisions.

Nonparticipation in Economic Activities: Strict observance of *pardah* in the village hampers girls' movement out of the house for participation in economic activities, making them totally dependent on the males. Second reason for females' nonparticipation is that it is considered as dishonour for the males. The males who send their females out for jobs face a bad reputation in the society, as if they are dependent on females' earnings. This concept is another major barrier to girls' education. House associated work including embroidery and crochet work is the only convenient choice for the females, for which the middleman only gives them a meager amount of money. The males of the household can easily earn in one day what females can earn after a hard labour during the whole month.

Temporary Family Membership: As a girl has to move to her husband's house for a permanent living under patrilocal residence rule prevailing in the society, she is treated as temporary member of the family in her father's house. Most of the families do not want to invest much on their daughters' education believing they have to leave after their marriage, and

investment on them would be of no use for them. This patrilocality residence system is another barrier in girls' education.

Inheritance: Islam as well as Pakistani law gives the right of inheritance to females. A woman is entitled to have half of the share of his brother in the parents' property. In practice, however, it rarely happens, especially in the rural societies like Zandra. They treat *zameen* (land) like a mother and nobody wants that his land goes to others' family. So a woman leaves her property to her brothers, which makes her eligible to receive gifts/economic support of the brothers on all special occasions like marriages, birth, death, etc. and in case of separation from her husband she can freely move back to her brothers' house. This inheritance factor is another barrier in female education, because if a girl gets an education, she can demand for her share in the property.

Parents' Opinion about the Barriers

While asking about the cultural barriers to girls' education and why the parents from different classes do not allow their daughters to study, a difference of opinion was found everywhere, between father and mother, between the classes and also between the age groups.

Fathers' Opinion: Fathers belonging from different classes and age groups have their own reasons for not sending their daughters to schools. The group of fathers aging more than 60 years was more concerned about *pardah* whereas the group between 20 to 40 years had economic reasons.

Table 2: Father's Opinion about the Barriers (60 plus)

BARRIERS	CLASSES		
	LOWER	MIDDLE	UPPER
<i>Pardah</i>	42	48	50
Division of Labour	Nil	Nil	Nil
Male Decision Makers	Nil	Nil	Nil
No Economic Contribution	05	02	Nil
Temporary Family Member	03	Nil	Nil

Inheritance	Nil	Nil	Nil
TOTAL	50	50	50

(Source: Field data)

Figure 2: Father's Opinion about the Barriers (60 plus)

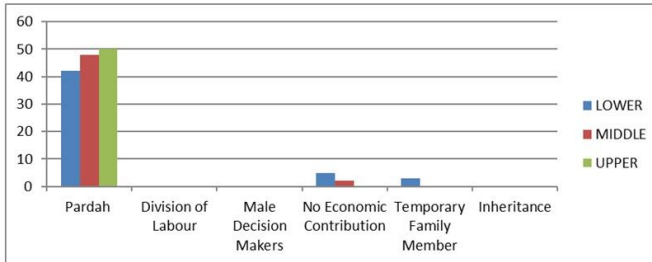


Table 3: Father's Opinion about the Barriers (41 – 60 years)

BARRIERS	CLASSES		
	LOWER	MIDDLE	UPPER
<i>Pardah</i>	27	23	24
Division of Labour	04	03	Nil
Male Decision Makers	Nil	Nil	Nil
No Economic Contribution	10	09	08
Temporary Family Member	09	08	08
Inheritance	Nil	07	10
TOTAL	50	50	50

(Source: Field data)

Figure 3: Father's Opinion about the Barriers (41 – 60 years)

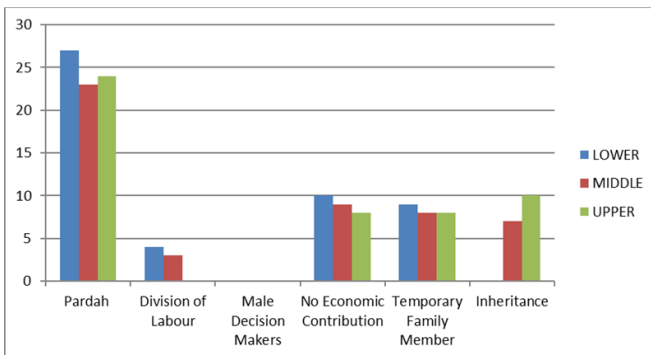
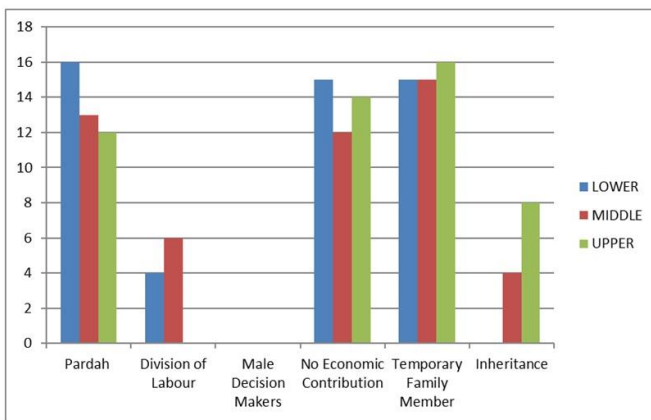


Table 4: Father's Opinion about the Barriers (21 – 40 years)

BARRIERS	CLASSES		
	LOWER	MIDDLE	UPPER
<i>Pardah</i>	16	13	12
Division of Labour	04	06	Nil
Male Decision Makers	Nil	Nil	Nil
No Economic Contribution	15	12	14
Temporary Family Member	15	15	16
Inheritance	Nil	04	08
TOTAL	50	50	50

(Source: Field data)

Figure 4: Father's Opinion about the Barriers (21 – 40 years)



Mothers' Opinion: Mothers have a slightly different opinion about female education. They have their own reasons for not sending their daughters to school. The pattern of change among males and females was almost similar. Among younger groups, both of them were more concerned for economic reasons. So with the passage of time the reasons have been shifted from *pardah* to economy which includes nonparticipation in economic activities, investment on temporary family member and the inheritance.

Table 5: Mother's Opinion about the Barriers (60 plus)

BARRIERS	CLASSES		
	LOWER	MIDDLE	UPPER
<i>Pardah</i>	23	30	28
Division of Labour	Nil	Nil	Nil

Male Decision Makers	17	14	12
No Economic Contribution	07	02	04
Temporary Family Member	03	04	Nil
Inheritance	Nil	Nil	06
TOTAL	50	50	50

(Source: Field data)

Figure 5: Mother's Opinion about the Barriers (60 plus)

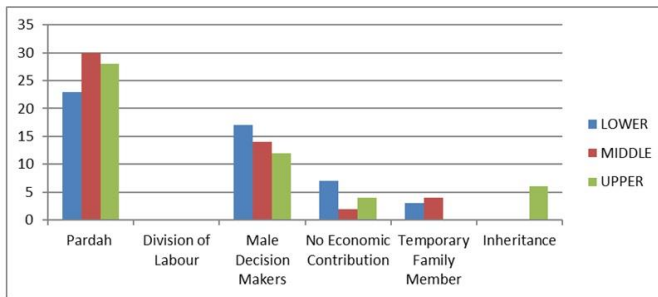


Table 6: Mother's Opinion about the Barriers (41 – 60 years)

BARRIERS	CLASSES		
	LOWER	MIDDLE	UPPER
<i>Pardah</i>	16	13	16
Division of Labour	04	03	Nil
Male Decision Makers	11	10	08
No Economic Contribution	10	09	08
Temporary Family Member	09	08	08
Inheritance	Nil	07	10
TOTAL	50	50	50

(Source: Field data)

Figure 6: Mother's Opinion about the Barriers (41 – 60 years)

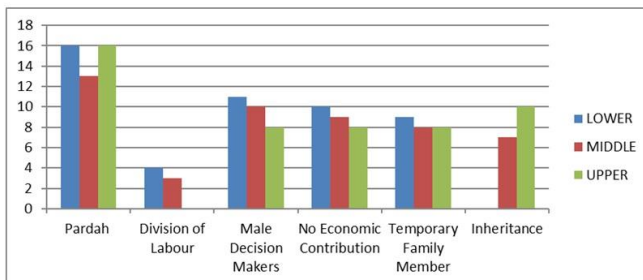
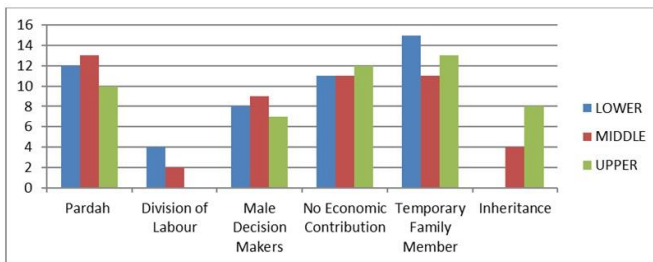


Table 7: Mother's Opinion about the Barriers (21 – 40 years)

BARRIERS	CLASSES		
	LOWER	MIDDLE	UPPER
<i>Pardah</i>	12	13	10
Division of Labour	04	02	Nil
Male Decision Makers	08	09	07
No Economic Contribution	11	11	12
Temporary Family Member	15	11	13
Inheritance	Nil	04	08
TOTAL	50	50	50

(Source: Field data)

Figure 7: Mother's Opinion about the Barriers (21 – 40 years)

Among the mothers *pardah* was an important reason, but the percentage was less than their spouses. The majority of them held male decision maker as responsible. They often said that as far as the education and future of their children is concerned the women have very little to say particularly about their daughters' education. It is the men who are responsible for the decision of the future of their children. During the course of conversation women expressed their intense desire for more education for their sons, but their husbands involved them in cultivation. When the facts were investigated sons were found uninterested in their studies because of lack of control and attention towards education in their homes.

Very few fathers were found who stopped their daughters' education at primary level believing that they would become stubborn. The majority of them were willing to send them to schools up to elementary or even up to secondary levels. Most of the girls having potential were allowed for

higher studies. The drop out cases were mainly because of their full time involvement in household chores which do not allow them to spare sufficient time for their studies. Mothers keep their daughters busy in household works for their own comfort. No matter who made or influence the decision, it comes to the father that he does not allow their daughters to study or to avail better education facilities.

Changes Observed during Recent Past

Despite the rigid customs and traditions which are being followed by the villagers, certain changes have also taken place, like "*pardah*" these days is not as strict as it was in the past. In the past the women had to wear a thick "*burkha*" from very young ages and had to cover themselves with it even in the summers, but now the girls have started wearing "*chadders*" and veils although they still cover their faces and bodies with them. The use of "*burkha*" has reduced to a great extent. In the past the "*pardah*" was so strict that women used to stop and turn their faces in the opposite direction or on the sides of the paths when they used to see men coming in their way, but this activity is now very rare. Then the girls and women only used to go out to meet their relatives during nighttime and that too with male companions, but now this practice is very rare. Now they can even go during the daytime. The girls go to school and "*madrassas*" etc., and women can also be seen as L.H.Vs and L.H.Ws so this trend has changed.

A change has also appeared in the context of education. In the past people didn't even allow their daughters to study, but now they have started getting their daughters educated. Most of my respondents said that it's because of the media. People have been made aware that it is as important for daughters to get education as it is for boys. There are many girls who were not allowed to study in the past, but now their younger sisters are being sent to school by their parents.

The attitudes regarding the gender discrimination in the field of education have changed. Initially the main reason for not sending their daughters to schools was *pardah* but now more of the economic reasons were reported. Some people are still reluctant to invest on their daughters because they are not permanent members of the family and mostly they do not contribute in the household economy even if they are working. Most of the parents say that we do not have to send them for jobs so why to educate them because the males who send their females for jobs face a bad reputation in the society. Economic dependence on females was considered as shamelessness (*baygharity*). This concept was and still is a barrier for the girls in access to education but there is a notable change in it. The people who educate and allow their daughters to work have a different argument. They say that there is nothing wrong in depending economically on females because the people have been doing it since a long time. The ladies have always been working in the fields with the males, which is an indirect economic contribution and the male has been enjoying it since forever. So there is no harm in sending the female to work.

Above discussion makes it clear that the economy is the main feature behind all types of gender discrimination, including education, food, preference, inheritance, etc. More investment is made on sons believing them as permanent members of the families as well as the earning hands. As the girls have to go to the other family. Delayed marriages of some educated working women were also observed, as the parents do not want to lose an earning member of the family so early as the investor wants the maximum benefit of his investment for himself not for the others.

As education enables a person to put a question, people do not give education to their daughters fearing that they would demand their right of inheritance. Here, thus, again economy plays a role in keeping the girls away from the school. Better food is served to the boys to build them stronger for working hard and earning money. So the sons are preferred in giving

food for economic benefits. Economy, thus, becomes the major player in gender discrimination. The today's materialistic life has created more demand for money, increasing discrimination against women.

Both the parents have different opinion regarding this issue. During the last two decades, this opinion has changed remarkably. No doubt the sons are still preferred but their attitude towards neutrality has really increased. The parents who preferred daughters' education were of the view that illiterate son could be accommodated somewhere in the business or he would take care of his own orchard but now it has become very difficult to marry an uneducated girl in a good family. Even the uneducated families have started demanding for educated girls. So it is always important to educate the daughter.

Conclusion

There was a time when girls were not allowed to speak against any order of their parents, especially fathers, uncles and brothers. But now it was observed that the girls have started speaking against not being allowed to study further, I've seen some girls who are getting higher education by force. Some girls, although have not educated themselves, but have made their parents send their younger sisters to school. Although these are only a few of the aspects in which change was seen, but these changes were seen in the majority of the families. Although the pace of social change is extremely slow but it is happening, showing that the rural society is not static and exposure to media and interaction with the urban community has also affected the Dasuha society in some ways.

But the harsh reality still holds a strong position as the girls of Dasuha, which is a fusion point of Punjabi Culture, are living in a conservative patriarchal and a partilineal society where they are assigned with the roles of a domestic worker expected to be submissive, chaste, "*purdah*" observing, dowry

making and ready to be wed off and to nicely settle down in the house of their in laws. A little education with full devotion to household chores in order to care and look after the members of the family in a docile and submissive manner is the normal life schedule of most of Dasuha girls who are groomed to accept the dominance of men as father, brother and husband.

The literacy level of the population shows that the women are the one who are less educated. Therefore, they are not given their due rights in the society as they cannot protest in getting their rights. The males do not accept this that the females are equivalent to them.

This study also highlights the fact that a conscious and persistent effort is to be made to educate the society about the equal status of males and females. The girls are to be allowed to get educated so that they can have the confidence to face the world. The parents should have a flexible attitude towards their children as it affects the life and personality of the children.

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