

# GENDERED ASPECTS OF INFORMAL EDUCATION IN CHILDHOOD: RESEARCH REFLECTIONS FROM THE RURAL PUNJAB, PAKISTAN

**Azher Hameed Qamar**  
Norwegian Centre for Child  
Research, NTNU  
NORWAY  
azher.qamar@svt.ntnu.no

## ABSTRACT

*Informal education plays an important role in social construction of childhood. As gender is widely accepted classification of human being in male and female, the debates go beyond its natural status and place gender as social construct. This article gives a presentation of research reflection regarding the role of informal education in gender learning in traditional rural society of the Punjab. Research is based in the empirical data collected through fieldwork. Findings uncover the social and cognitive learning system of informal education that start working before birth, finally constructing gendered identity and role description.*

*Keywords: informal education, gender, socialization, social construction*

## INTRODUCTION

Being a child is not a universal experience but it is socially constructed shaped by a range of social, cultural, and historical dynamics (Franklin, 1995 and James and Prout, 1990). The perception of the childhood differs across cultures and societies. In most societies there is a clear distinction between childhood and adulthood, and different norms, values and expectations are attached to them (Franklin 1995, Montgomery 2003). Informal education plays an important role in social construction of childhood. Traditional rural societies enriched with a complex blend of cultural and religious traditions provide essentials for constructing childhood. These essentials start working soon after the birth (or even before birth<sup>1</sup>) and develop a child into a required adult best fit in the society. Rural society of the province of Punjab in Pakistan holds and preserves the major characteristics of a traditional patriarchal society where religion and culture formulate the context for informal education focusing gender is a key factor. Three main features of Punjabi rural society are (Qamar, 2010);

- An interdependent extended family system that is strengthened through marriages within the family or clans.
- Conservative cultural approach, measured as the dignity and honor one should adhere.
- Gendered socialization based in this approach.

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<sup>1</sup> Being conscious about the gender of the baby before birth, Seeking religious and/or medical help to ensure the birth of a baby-boy

By assigning gender specific social roles supported by cultural or religious rules and values social construction of gender occurs (Epstein, 2006). Informal education as socialization agent acts in multiple directions and negotiate family-child, parent-child, and child-child relationships. One of the important functions of this education is to position child as a boy and a girl in the society and later developing a gender specific role identity. If you are well familiar with non-verbal expressions in a cultural setting, you can guess the expressions when news of the baby-birth is shared. First thing the people in the family primarily concern is whether baby is boy or a girl? Accordingly facial expressions (even some time verbal expressions) give the first lesson of gendered socialization. Then naming the baby to recognize its gender by its name, later followed by other birth rituals (e.g. *Aqiqa*<sup>2</sup>) discloses additional gender specific aspects. Similarly the way baby is addressed and dressed also gendered. Gradually informal education (through verbal- nonverbal means) grows an infant to a young child who is either a boy or a girl and is acquainted with what to dress, how to look like, what to do and several other do's and don'ts. The success of informal education lies in its all-time continuity, availability and the variety of social actors who are performing it. With the passage of time a young boy and a young girl learn their gender-specific roles and all norms that are needed to be socially acceptable and desirable. Informal education in childhood is the reflection of the cultural presentation of the required/desired adult men and women. This article is a presentation of research reflections that I learned while doing fieldworks (during my masters and now in Ph.D) in rural Punjab, Pakistan. The findings are primarily based on the data collected during the two month fieldwork in August-September 2009 that I did in my masters but reflections also include my recent five month Ph.D fieldwork.

## CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Socialization is commonly defined as the social interactions ensuing the learning of culture (beliefs, values, behaviors etc), formation of human personality, and social behavior development to integrate into societies and negotiate their identities. Education and socialization are a part of each other (Wyatt, 2008). Education deals with the whole child development. An individual influenced by the environment and social agents experience learning by living (Leathes, 2009 and Partridge, 2009). Education, from birth till death, goes through three modes that differ, more or less, in style, process and methods but also interlinked; formal, informal and non-formal (Scheerens, 2009 and Rogers, 2005). Formal education is hierarchically structured and chronologically graded and non-formal education is though structured but flexible and linked with community groups and organizations. With the expansion of non-formal education sector and its integration with formal education, the terms 'formal' and 'non-formal' cannot be universalized as two explicitly different terms because of many diverse forms of education in practice (Rogers, 2005). Hence a combination of formal and non-formal education is serving almost in the same way for specific objectives. Whereas informal education is a lifelong process of acquiring knowledge, skills, attitude and social behavior through often unstructured, unorganized and unsystematic education. Home, family, work, play, media, people, places and self-experience are the educative forces negotiating with the individuals deliberately and reflexively. Informal education, unquestionably, starts from the birth. A child is born with certain motor skills to interact according to its initial needs, for example; the sucking and grasping skills. Soon after opening eyes, infant started interacting with this new world. Along with biological and psychological development of a child, socialization also occurs and child learns to be an adult, able enough to perform his/her social roles and help in continuity of socialization process.

We experience socialization process every time we connect ourselves (in whatsoever way) with the society and this experience diverges with the difference of culture and societies. Simply doing different things in routines we maintain our association with the social settings we belong to and gives meaning to our actions leading to shared understanding (Coltrane, 1998). Gender is one of the main features of a social setting. It categorizes the members of the society in male and female,

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<sup>2</sup>*Aqiqa* is a goat-sacrifice Islamic birth ritual. In Punjab Muslim parents sacrifice two goats for a son and one for a girl indicating that boys are more valuable because of the role they have to play as family head in future.

simultaneously constituting the gendered socialization. While I was working on this article, a friend of mine visited me. He picked up a book and said

“Oh, Gender ...”

“Ya! You know what is it?” I asked

“.. oh yes.. hot topic in your studies.. gender discrimination..” He smiled

“Gender discrimination..hm.. but why and how?” I asked

“I don’t think it is a rocket science..in some societies gender differences are exploited..” He replied

“How do we or others know that we are different by gender?” I continued with my curiosity to know his perspective.

“Come on, I know I am male and similarly a girl know she is a female. We are biologically different.” He said in a way like I am asking a stupid question.

“So that’s what you think gender is?” I inquired

“Well, may be little more. Like the way we behave... (may be)” Now he was tired of my questions.

“Does it not something we learn all the time through our culture to be a man or a woman?” I asked with an intention to continue discussion.

“Hmm..may be.. but we are biologically made to do something differently..” Then he quits..

Most of the people take gender as a biological term for granted and thus position this ‘natural’ status of gender in the society according to their cultural context. In spite of varied specific definition of masculinity and femininity, the taken-for-granted view is that member of a society is either a male or a female (Chafetz, 2006). Gender is an abstract concept. Biologically, if it is easy to distinguish between male and female, socially it is complex because of diverse social structure across cultures. According to Epstein (2006, p.53), “definitions of male and female often follow stereotypes and may not accurately reflect the actual behavior of men and women or the range of behaviors exhibited by each sex”. Coltrane (1998, p.7) defines gender as;

“Gender refers to what it means to be a man or a woman in a specific time and place”

Referring ‘specific time and place’ leads to a social context where gender is defined and thus includes the cultural norms being followed at certain time in specific settings. A child born in a particular culture starts recognizing himself/herself as a male or female through the cultural patterns of gendered identity and initiate his/her active role as male/female. According to Maccoby (2003, p.294) “As the cultural messages, the social assumptions, and the script concerning gender are absorbed by children, they have a powerful impact on the way children construct their identity as male or female individuals”. Most of the feminist theories include cultural definition of masculinity and femininity as one of the fundamental component of gender discrimination in any system (Chafetz, 2006).

Nevertheless ‘culture’ is also a complex, multidimensional and diverse term with several definitions from broader meanings applied to a whole society to specific contextual concept limited to certain category. Yet all definitions focus some aspects of human behavior in everyday life. Nelson (1997, p.174) while presenting culture as learned, shared and dynamic, gives a contemporary formulation of the famous classic definition given by Edward Tylor, i.e “complex range of beliefs, values and attitudes shared perpetuated by members of a social group”. Gender is described in different cultures differently and a whole system of learning and doing gender works under this umbrella. Since gender is a lifelong process, there are theories focusing on acquiring gender knowledge in childhood and adulthood. Sociological theories emphasizing on sociocultural factors explain gender as socially constructed where gender stereotypes frame the gendered pattern of behavior reinforcing gender roles. Another theory that integrates the psychological and sociocultural factors in gender development is

social cognitive theory (Bussey& Bandura, 1999). Bussey and Bandura (1999) explains gender development as cognitively processed through three modes of influence, as under;

Modeling - Gender information presented and exemplified in the context by parents, peers, significant members of the society and mass media.

Enactive experience - Gendered conduct under social sanctions

Direct tuition - Learning appropriate gendered behavior through direct tuition

Since gender is constructed in patriarchal societies in many ways, it will be useful to recall the famous three cultural lenses described by Sandra Bem (1993) to have a deep look into gender construction in context. And they are;

Androcentrism - Male freedom and male experience taken as a norm

Gender Polarization – treating men and women as two different gendered identities

Biological Essentialism – Accepting gender inequalities as natural

Gender is depicted one way or other in our routine lives. Economic or social activities, day-to-day interactions, using language (verbal labeling), performing rituals and customs present gender distinctively. If not all, most of the societies give space to gendered identities and nurture them through informal education.

### **Gender, Family and Parenting**

Defining family is as difficult as defining gender. There is no fixed definition, although for legislative or population census purposes there are definitions adopted or defined by the state. To be precise family in a social setting means a unit that contains more than one member. Who may be these members and how they may be linked to each other (e.g biologically etc), depends on the cultural context and socially accepted definition of the members individually (e.g father, mother, offspring etc). For sake of being focused in the context where I did my research, I should say in general that a Pakistani family consists of biological parents, grandparents (here it means father's parents), and children who are interdependent in some way. If father's brother and sister are unmarried living with him, they are also included in the family.

Family is also deeply associated with the concept of home where members of the family begin their life. Unlike school, home is an institution where learning patterns may differ according to family values and traditions. A child is focused as a member of the family, growing into an adult, a representative of the family. Informal education at first occurs at home by the family. Family is a place where rituals and customs are performed while defining boundaries and placing family members in their respective position in the family, also highlighting the members who are not in the family (Coltrane, 1998). Whenever we visit a home, what we expect to see before going? Few members who are living in a specific cultural setting. Infact we see a whole culture. Language, food, clothing, greetings, hospitality, inclusion and exclusion of family members during this meeting and even wall hangings and interior will display a culture. Parents/caretakers hold a significant position in the family. They are responsible to socialize their offspring to make them an honorable member of the society. Gender is never neglected in this socialization process. Socialization theory of childhood engenderment describes the engenderment process beginning at the birth. Chafetz (2006) refers several studies describing the engenderment process through number of practices within and outside the family; like handling the infant, gender-specific naming, clothing, communication and toys, gendered parenting, reinforcing gendered-appropriate behavior etc. In a family, parents act as a father and a mother and this is a gendered role description. In many societies, certain baby-care tasks are considered as woman's work. Psychodynamic Theory relates gendered identity development as a result of the mother-child relationship. Infants acquire sense of gender identity in his/her early years when he/she is nurtured by parents where mother is a primary care taker (Wood, 2010). While explaining psychodynamic theory, Wood (2010) refers Nancy Chodorow (1989) who views mother as

a primary care taker nurturing the child, thus creating gender as mother herself is gendered. Mother's interaction with son and daughter is also gendered. She finds herself closer to the daughter due to gender likeness and encourages son to be more independent. This attitude later develops into a gender identity both for son and daughter, where daughter learns to be like her mother and son learns to be different. Another theory that describes gender development by relationships in a different way is Social Learning theory. Social Learning theory focuses on learning by imitation, often reinforced by reward in some way. Parents appreciate children in different ways when they act according to their gender identity. Children, at early stage like to do things like their parents. As they desire to receive an appreciated attention, they perform the way they are expected. Parents, media and other members in the society help in developing gender identity. Social learning theory perceives children as passive learner and learning process is life-long. Cognitive Development theory views children as active learners who learn by interaction. Infants during interaction learn how they are labeled as male and female. Later they achieved gender constancy and establish their gender identity. Then reinforced by motivation and models (often the parents) they tend to perform as competent female or male (Wood, 2010). Parents perform a key role shaping an informal education system in home. Siblings who are grown enough to recognize their gender respective place and role in the family also participate in forming gender identities of younger siblings. Parents stimulate participation in gendered activities, for example a girl goes to the kitchen and a boy goes to the market. These activities help to learn future roles the children are most likely to play in their family lives as adults. In traditional societies, parents also focus the development of traditional gender identities. In an Asian family-oriented patriarchal society, the members successfully acquire their gender identity by following set of instructions/restrictions and refuting modern feminist notions or western models of gender equality. This set of instructions/restrictions designed by the culture and implemented in informal education domain controls all aspects of social behaviors including clothing, communication, social spheres, activities, leisure and play. Influenced by religious myths and epics, traditional norms and values, and politics of patriarchal social system traditional role models and personality concepts are also highly gendered, for example, the concept of shame and modesty and feminine ideals.

### Gender and Every-Day Life

*A Family –*

*Masculine Identities-* Grandfather, Father, Husband, Son, Brother

*Feminine Identities –* Grandmother, Mother, Wife, Daughter, Sister



Every time when we talk about man and woman, we are doing gender.

We cannot be objective at all while discussing about gender because we also feel ourselves attached to one of the gender. The social actors we experience in our routine lives are identified by their gender. Verbal labeling and symbols highlights gender. Few occupations are considerably gendered and very first impression indicates the gender attached to them. For example, Nun, Nurse, Postman, Milkman disclose gender in their names. Other professions that do not disclose gender in name but perceived as masculine professions in many societies are, for example, a Cobbler, a Potter. Similarly media presentation of gender and gender depicted in popular culture also help in constructing gender identities required or desired in a society.

In religious societies or in the societies which gives significant space to a certain religions, religious ideals of gender identity also influence the social construction process. For example, in Abrahamic religions God, Angels, and Prophets holds a masculine identity. In Hinduism, though there is a concept of god and goddess, yet mythical position of a goddess is a subordinate to a god. Religious scriptures also describe gender roles and gender position in the society. Birth, wedding, divorce, and death rituals and customs are influenced with religious descriptions of gender.

Culture and society being dominant in child rearing and defining childhood in social perspective (James and Prout, 1990) provide basis of social construction of childhood. Traditional rural society is a combination of culture and religion that affects children life since their birth. Every child while

growing into an adult learns a gender-specific role and appearance gradually and it helps to be best fit in the rural society. A large part of education occurs in informal settings where parents, elders and fellows leave their marks through social interaction (Leathes, 2009). Hence, as informal education includes transmitting culture from one generation to the next, gender as a significant inevitable component is also constructed and constituted. Family, home, and society participate to institutionalize the socialization process of gender construction. A 'successful' socialization occurs when child achieves his/her culture-oriented gender identity and able to perform his/her gendered role in the society.

## METHODOLOGY

The article is primarily based in the data I collected during two month fieldwork (for my Masters thesis with the title "Challenges Associated with Primary Education in Rural Punjab, Pakistan") in rural Punjab, Pakistan. Data collection methods I employed include participant observation, children questionnaire, and unstructured interviews. One hundred children of age 9-13 years (including 40 boys and 60 girls) are accessed randomly to fill in the questionnaire. The main purpose of the questionnaire is to know about the children's domestic activities, their future ambitions, parent's economic activity and family size. Keeping in view the problems with writing skills of the children, I designed the questionnaire including simple question/answers and a checklist of daily activities. Participant observation and unstructured interviews are used to uncover the context with its actual meaning and perception of parents and young people. In addition, I used effectively my five month fieldwork in rural Punjab (that I did in my Ph.D studies to look into early child-care beliefs and customs) as an empirical support to the topic.

## CULTURAL CONTEXT

Rural areas of Pakistan are more populated than urban areas. Since agriculture is the backbone of Pakistani economy, rural areas presents the culture of an agrarian society. Rural areas though in some way have different customs in different provinces but they have strong interdependent extended family system and traditional rural society. Religion and culture are two important components of rural social life. Family values and cultural norms are above all. Tribes and clans are strict in their values and social interactions. Being a patriarchal society, gender discrimination is a part of overall Pakistani culture. Caste system (clans/tribes) is particularly a prominent feature of rural Pakistan. Conservative sense of belonging to a particular caste works in developing social relations, e.g marriage. Marriages mostly take place within the family or within the caste. Political figures also exploit the conservative caste-sensitivity to get support in elections. Socio-cultural practices can be observed in almost all spheres of life. Pregnancy, birth, wedding, death, and many other events give a clustered religious and cultural presentation of rural social life. Gender is as important as the culture itself. There is no confusion of gender identity and individuals are placed explicitly in male and female position. Their social spheres are distinguished. They are encouraged and positively or negatively reinforced to behave in a gendered way. Leisure, play, and work present a gendered pattern of social interaction. Young girls are supposed to do most household works whereas boys are busy in outside business. With the expansion of formal education and socio-economical transitions, in most of the families, girls and boys are equally encouraged to go to school but the girls are not supposed to get higher education usually. Higher education for girls can help parents to arrange a good marriage but for boys higher education is seen more in economic perspective to get better jobs. Boys have a choice for jobs but educated girls are only appreciated to do teaching jobs (considering an 'honorable' job for the girls) in the village or some nearby village. Females, though taking part in almost all chores of life, are limited to family traditions and to perform predefined role in the society. Parents send their children to mosque for early Islamic education related to offering prayer and reading Qur'an (the holy book for Muslims). People have emotional association with the religion. They seek guidance from the religious figures who may be spiritual leaders (*Pir sab*) or religious teachers (*Imam/Molvi sab*) in the mosque. Their opinion is taken seriously and considered exactly religious. These religious figures significantly influence gendered construction of social identities.

Families acts as institutions and provide a great source of traditions and culture. Families also show their concern when their cultural infrastructure is disturbed. Direct external influences are not tolerated. Although there is an expansion of formal schooling, yet due to a number of reasons (for example contextual quality of the formal education) the gaps between informal and formal education are too wide to bring about cultural reforms, especially in gender construction.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

**Figure 1.** Baby wearing a *tawiz* that his mother used to wear during pregnancy

*Inspite of praying a lot, this was third time I gave birth to a daughter. Then we visited our Pir sab (spiritual leader) who gave me a tawiz (amulet) to wear. It is Allah's blessing that last year finally we had a son. Now to fulfill the vow we had, our son will wear this tawiz for first seven years. He is our only son after three daughters, he is very special.*  
(A Mother - Field Notes)



### Welcoming the New Born – First Gendered Experience

In rural Punjab, being childless or having no baby son is more or less equally painful. Being childless means you are incomplete and your future is dependent on others to whom you don't owe a right. Having only daughters and no son means you are having a burden and you are left alone in socio-economical spheres of life. The families with bigger family size usually have more daughters than sons (primary data). It also shows a common reason for over population in the Punjab. Abortions are not culturally acceptable and are considered a sin and a crime. Parents in an effort to get a son at last have more daughters.

Son is considered a great and perhaps only support to the parents in their old age. Traditional midwives and experience ladies try to forecast the baby's gender by observing certain behaviors in pregnant women.

*If pregnant woman's feeling are pleasant during pregnancy, the baby is a boy and vice versa. If there are more women in the family of the pregnant woman, it is expected that she will give birth to a girl, and vice versa.* (A traditional midwife's comments – Field Notes)

Child is positioned as a male or female at the time of birth. Majority of the parents wish to have first baby a boy. Number of religious, spiritual, and medical efforts is made to fulfill this desire. Couples visit shrines, make offerings and vows, wear amulets and desperately pray for a baby son. Therefore if the baby is a boy pleasure of becoming parents multiplied. Parents seek every possible protection and care for the new baby to save him from the evil eye and other mysterious harms.

### Figure 2.

Leaves of a tree (locally named as *shree'n*) hanged at the entrance door. This is an announcement of the birth of a baby boy and also a warning to the visitors not to enter the house for forty days if they are wearing any *tawiz*<sup>3</sup>. Anyways after putting off the *tawiz* outside they can enter and visit the baby.



<sup>3</sup> It is believed that if, during first forty days of the birth of the baby, a visitor wearing *tawiz* enter the house, it may be harmful for the mother and the baby.

Folk entertainers and other folk singers who earn some money by performing on celebrations and ceremonies know fairly well the importance of baby-boy's birth and never miss the opportunity. Parents themselves express more generosity at the birth of the baby-boy.

Abdul is an old farmer and his elder son (one of the two sons) cannot walk properly due to disability. He married him few years ago and the first baby was a girl. Few days ago Allah blessed him with a son. Old Abdul who has been worried about his elder son is quite satisfied now. This baby-boy will be a great support to the disable father in future. Abdul, who is not considered a man to spend money for nothing, told me that on the birth of this baby he had to spend lot of money. Folk entertainers, singers, beggars demand more on a baby-boy's birth and he could not refuse any of them. Similarly at the time of circumcision and then *aqiqa* ceremony he had been generous enough. News is though greater than that.

*"Allah has granted a support for the poor disable father. It is a great blessing for him. There are people who are normal and even prosperous but they don't have children or they have many daughters."* Congratulating remarks from the visitors – Field Notes

**Figure 3.**

*"Come on boy! Get up! Cattle are hungry, why not you feed them. I am old now"*

Grandfather and father celebrating the birth of a baby-boy and feeling the pleasure of a 'secure future'



Regarding other birth rituals, *aqiqa* is one of the important religiously inspired birth rites. Parents, if they can afford, sacrifice two goats for a son and one goat for a daughter to perform *aqiqa* ritual. Anyways in case of limited resources, they prefer to perform *aqiqa* for the boy at least. *Aqiqa* is considered a virtue to invoke Allah's blessing and to remove the calamities that may happen. It also shows the social worth of a baby-boy that he is going to hold in future as a family head.

Naming the baby is a verbal labeling that expresses the gender of the baby. While naming the baby people take care of the gender and masculine names are assigned to baby-boys and vice versa. Hence 'welcoming the newborn' conveys a message of gender identity and gender role in future earlier in infancy. Desire to have a baby boy and gender differentiated in early childhood point to the social value attached to a boy and confidence in his 'masculinity' to be a future family head. On the other hand a girl is supposed to leave parent's house after marriage to be a part of another family. This presumed status of a boy and a girl is a cultural construct. In united India (Pakistan, India, Bangladesh) male dominated gendered positioning is deep rooted in Indian family system regardless of religious affiliations.

### **Gender Learning –Family, Home and Society**

*Echoes – Come on! Be a man. Don't cry like a girl. Be honorable like a man. Look he is behaving like a girl. He is an emotional fool like a girl. I am the family head.*

*Echoes – Are you not ashamed of? Will you disobey your husband, father, and brother? Have you no sense of shame? What will the people say about you? You are dishonoring our family. Be a good obedient wife/daughter.*

A rural childhood is a great deal of learning. Growing up in a rural family means learning of behavior, skills and attitude to perform assigned social roles in future while maintaining ties with culture.



Parents socialize their children to follow the family traditions and socio-culture norms. Children displaying appropriate behavior win a social appreciation for themselves and their parents. Anyways ‘appropriate behavior’ is defined culturally in general and contextually in particular (Coltrane, 2000). In rural Punjab appropriate behavior is mainly attached to sensitive concepts of ‘modesty, shame and honor’. All three concepts are gendered and backed up by negative and positive reinforcement learning strategies. Family’s reputation and parent’s respect in the society is sensitive and at risk if appropriate behavior is not cultivated. Gender boundaries define proper behavior and through modeling and enactive experience (Bussey and Bandura, 1999) cognitive learning experience initiate. Children must know that any improper behavior they display can influence on the family reputation in the society. Language, attitude, gestures, postures, clothing, habits, and interactions express ‘behavior’ and in many ways they are gendered. A woman body while sitting, lying or standing should not be exposed. She needs to cover her body properly. Abusing words while showing anger are not too bad for the man but it is embarrassing for a woman. Using language is also considerably gendered. A wife should use respectable language while addressing to her husband and it is necessarily not the same when the husband address to his wife. While reviewing my field data, I found around 35 responses/comments that describe a contextual perception regarding gendered behavior attributes. Following chart display a comparison of male-female behavior attributes;

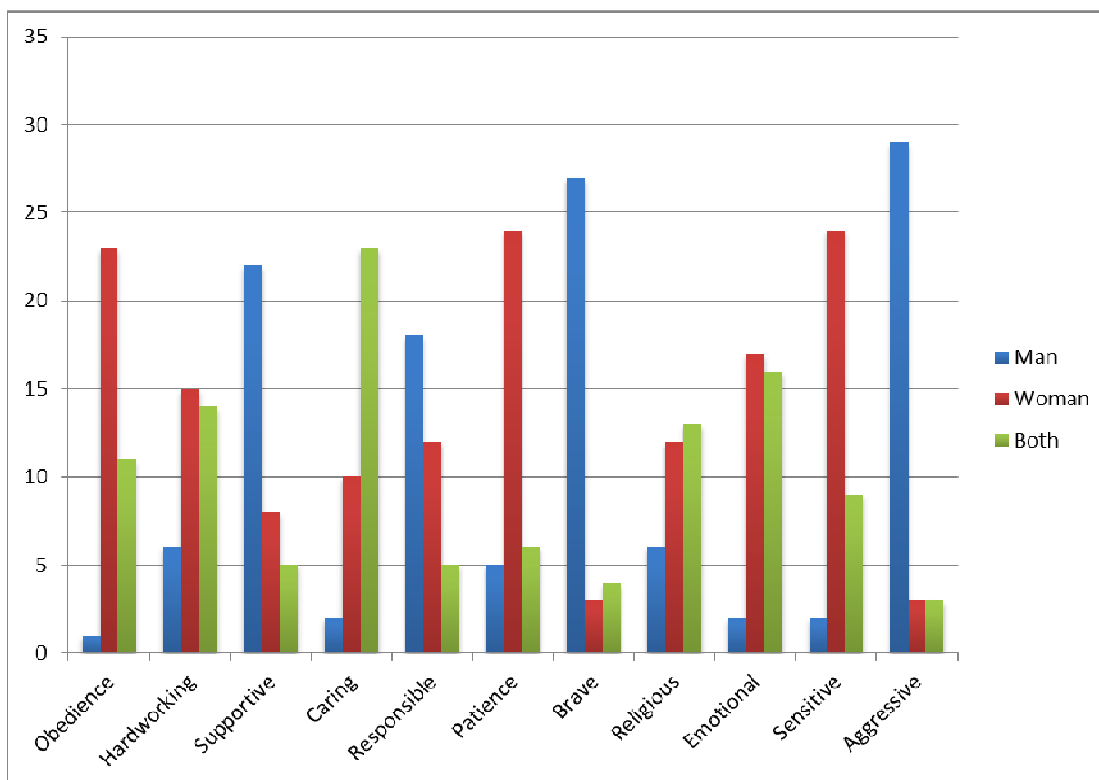


Figure 4. A comparison of male-female behavior attributes

Figure 4 shows aggressive, brave, responsible, and brave attitude as primarily masculine attributes, whereas sensitive, patience, hardworking and obedience as primary feminine attributes. These perceptions also show how adults and young people themselves develop a shared understanding of these gendered attributes and present a gender model. A shift of some behavior from one gender to another may cause serious embarrassment in particular social sphere (Bussey and Bandura, 1999) . For example a woman being aggressive, imitating masculine body or even dressed like a man will face the music. The criticism within that social sphere may be so intense that family’s reputation will

be at risk. Gender-appropriate behavior model is presented as an appreciated ideal to follow and it stimulates the social learning process. Gender roles are defined or constructed accordingly. Once the individual gains gender constancy, exert him/her to learn their role by doing gender. Children's position as an active or passive learner depends on how their childhood is placed in the context. In traditional rural society, in my opinion as I perceived from my research, since early childhood learning starts by imitating and child shows a sensitive attitude towards parent's negative/positive reinforcement, child as a passive learner gains gender constancy. Later as the child start participating in gender activities he/she becomes more active learner.

Two main roles that a male and female have to perform in their life are perceived culturally as;

Man as the head of the family holds economic and financial responsibilities. He is naturally built to perform these responsibilities. He is also considered a major decision maker in important family matters, for example marriage

Woman should manage and maintain the domestic affairs. She is responsible for looking after the children, cooking, cleaning, washing and other domestic tasks. A rural woman may be, has to perform other tasks as well, for example picking up cotton, milking the cows, since children and home are her primary concerns.

During my fieldwork, I observed, on number of occasion, children imitating the elders but interesting thing was the gendered imitation. For example, a three years old girl placing plates and cups on the dining-mat just like her mother and a five years old boy trying to help his father to load the cart. By doing things like their parents or elder siblings, children initiate interaction with the human and non-human objects. More interactions give way to more reinforcement resulting into further learning of patterned behavior and skills leading to role playing. A male-child trying to wear bangles, applying lipstick, or dressing like a girl may be, at first, considered funny but parents will not take it as normal in any social gathering. If a young boy tries to do this, this is no more a funny business rather serious. He will be discouraged and stopped to do such 'stupid' things again. Same goes with a female. See these two pictures, do you recognize the male and female infant;



Figure 5. A female and male infant

A grown up girl is required to learn the skills and behaviors that can help her to spend a happy life in her in-laws. She must be aware of social norms, moral codes, and essentials of a domestic life. To be a competent mother to her children and a desirable wife to her husband, she must be a 'woman'. On the other hand, a boy is required to learn the skills and behaviors that can help him to be a breadwinner and a wise decision maker for the family. Since he is going to be family head in future, he must be well familiar with social, cultural norms, economic strategies, family wisdom and brave decision making. He is supposed to be caretaker in the absence of family head. He is also considered as a protector of the vulnerable members of the family, i.e. women and children. Perceptions about

gendered roles are based in certain cultural concepts, which are also considered as the basis of a firm family system (Qamar, 2010):

- Discrimination on the basis of physical, mental strengths and social, economic status as defined by the prejudiced responsibilities.
- A girl should be trained to serve the male members of the family because an ideal wife is the one, whose love is selfless like mother and whose service is dedicated like daughter (this concept goes for an ideal daughter and an ideal mother as well).
- A girl should learn the submission of her own will. This is the role she has to play towards her parents when unmarried and to her husband and in-laws when she marries.
- The real home of a daughter is her husband's home and she is supposed to leave her parents, brothers and sisters one day.

Informal education revolves around the family values that are highly influenced by the community requirements based in traditions and culture. Though a gradual change can be observed in some aspects, for example people are inspired to educate their children or they are on a limited scale allow the girls to do jobs. But their motives are still gendered. A boy's higher education means the economic security and securing boy's position as family head. Whereas a girl's higher education (if she is allowed) means to arrange good marriage for her as boys are looking for educated girls now. Suppose if, with the permission of male members, a girl is allowed to do job, she is obliged to do the 'honorable' job, i.e teaching in a nearby school. The difference of perceptions in educating boys and girls disclose the expected gender role. Education is acceptable if it is confined with predefined gender roles and the concept of "respectable jobs for the girls". Majority of the parents don't think higher education is necessary for girls. The few ones who are able to get higher education can only choose between teaching or medical profession, provided that their place of employment is not far from home and they are permitted by the males they depend on (father/caretaker or husband). In my data 90 percent girls wished to be teachers and doctors. Based on the responses from interviews and observation, I conclude the reasons as under:

- It is easy to find a teaching or medical-profession jobs nearby
- These two jobs are accepted as respectable for girls by the community
- Community don't like girls being employed in offices, marketing or other related jobs
- Girls are not supposed to support the family financially

A girl on job can support the family but it is against cultural norms and not liked. Why people do not like girls to do jobs? Why a significant majority of the girls wish for medical and teaching professions? This attitude is based in 'informal schooling', the schooling of culture and religion. Over all it looks like gender discrimination is not only based in educational inequalities, as Ellis (2000) describes, but there are cultural factors and religious issues where people show their deep concern. Informal education actually helps to become socially acceptable in that specific community according to the contextual structure already exist.

### **Domestic Chores and Leisure Activities**

In rural areas, children can be seen participating in domestic activities and helping their parents at an early age. As described earlier gender discrimination is a feature of the rural society, children's participation in domestic chores and leisure activities also gives a gendered description. Almost all of the children who can understand some domestic task perform at their best. School going children do domestic chores before and after school for example, feeding the cattle, packing up the beds, making tea, cleaning the house, collecting firewoods etc. 100 school going children (9-13 years) were given questionnaires with a checklist of 30 domestic activities. All children were engaged in different domestic chores before and after school. Some of these domestic chores were gender-based. For example, girls mostly do cooking, cleaning, washing jobs and dressing, cleaning the children.

Whereas boys mostly do shopping and fetching jobs and look after the cattle. Table 1 gives a detailed description of the daily activities with the percentage of boys and girls performing these tasks. Gendered domestic provide basis to learn future roles these children are most likely to play in their family lives as adults.

Table 1. Primary Data – Daily Activities, (Qamar, 2010)

Children Questionnaire: School Going Children (9 to 13 years) - checklist data - daily activities

Activities	Girls (T. 60)	Girls %	Boys (T. 40)	Boys %
Prepare vegetables or meat for cooking	29	48.3	16	40
Make (knead) flour to cook bread	47	78.3	1	2.5
Cooking food	6	10.0	1	2.5
Making tea or preparing Lassi (a drink prepared from milk)	34	56.7	23	57.5
Milking cow or goats	1	1.7	12	30
Grinding corn or spices	13	21.7	8	20
Cleaning the house	52	86.7	19	47.5
Washing the clothes	32	53.3	7	17.5
Washing dishes	49	81.7	8	20
Fetching water	4	6.7	26	65
Collecting firewoods	16	26.7	30	75
Carrying meal to household members in the fields	5	8.3	14	35.0
Dressing the children	26	43.3	12	30.0
Cleaning and bathing children	20	33.3	8	20.0
Feeding children	17	28.3	18	45.0
Playing with children	43	71.7	33	82.5
Preparing / cutting food for cows, goats	5	8.3	19	47.5
Feeding cows, goats	13	21.7	25	62.5
Taking animals to drink water	7	11.7	21	52.5
Feeding hens, ducks with corn	12	20	22	55
Picking cotton from cotton fields	9	15	8	20
Harvesting crops	1	1.7	10	25
Picking fruits and vegetables	15	25	12	30
Irrigating crops	1	1.7	7	17.5
Sowing	0	0	5	12.5
Ploughing or weeding	0	0	8	20
Making beds for sleep at night and packing up in the morning	44	73.3	22	55
Shopping for households	5	8.3	29	72.5
Iron the clothes	12	20	1	2.5
Sewing / embroidery clothes	4	6.7	0	0

## Leisure and Play

Leisure and playing activities segregate the children in their gender social spheres and places as they grow up. Girls play with girls and boys play with boys. Boys stay outside and play in the streets or playgrounds and girls remain indoor.

Girls don't have too many choices to play due to lack of resources and restrictions to play outdoors. Therefore they are limited to few indoor games. Young girls mostly like to play with dolls. They have handmade or plastic dolls and best activity is to arrange a doll's marriage. Little girls gather in some friend's house and arrange a marriage. If they don't have a male and female doll, then they manage to identify the dolls by clothing them in gender. Such games are a source of social and traditional learning at home as well. They try to cook food, do some embroidery, sew clothes and almost celebrate in the same way as it is celebrated in reality. But, unlike boys, girls come out of the 'playing with dolls age' earlier. They have to learn the much needed real life skills. So they start learning sewing, embroidery, cooking etc in their leisure time.



Figure 6. Boys playing in the street



Figure 7. Girls arranging doll's marriage

Boys wander in the street, play hide and seek, or with a ball and a stick. Young boys, mostly above 15 years, sit in the street till late at nights playing board games and gossiping. They talk about their work, daily routine, and almost everything happening in the village and its surroundings. They have to do a lot of work especially in sowing and harvesting season but they find some time to play or get engaged

in an outdoor social activity. Boys, taking advantage of playing outdoors, have quite a few choices to play. They enjoy street games and other sports like cricket, hockey and football.

## CONCLUSION

These research reflections give a vivid picture of engendered informal education in Punjabi rural society. People's concern with the gender of the baby begins before birth. At the time of the birth a child is biologically distinguished as a boy or a girl. This biological definition of gender places the new born baby in culturally defined gender sphere. Prejudices start working and social construction of gender is established. Naming, clothing, and interacting with the infant in a gendered tone are culturally programmed efforts to convey polite message of his/her future becoming. Since gender specific roles are predefined and are supported by strong religious and cultural traditions, gendered ideals already model the future personality of the child. Child with his/her gradually developing social interaction skills connects to the shared meaning and start learning. Considering child as a social minor, adults interact with the child exerting reinforcement behavior and design an influential learning environment providing gendered choices to imitate. A sense of 'being one of them' stimulate the child to adopt the desired behavior and personify him/herself in gendered position to 'become one like them'. Informal education is multifaceted but interlinked. Family, friends, society and media promote the culture to ensure their unique identity. Therefore, in a traditional patriarchal rural society, informal education itself does not give space to major changes, but integrating formal education with informal education with its contextual understanding the culture may be institutionalized to bring up reforms.

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