

## GENDER BIASED PARENTAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF VILLAGE DASUHA, DISTRICT FAISALABAD

Mamonah Ambreen<sup>1</sup>, Anwaar Mohyuddin<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> DNFCE, Faculty of Education, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad, &

<sup>2</sup> Department of Anthropology, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad,  
PAKISTAN.

<sup>1</sup> [mamonahambreen@yahoo.com](mailto:mamonahambreen@yahoo.com), <sup>2</sup> [unwaar@gmail.com](mailto:unwaar@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

*This research paper is an attempt to study the preference of males over the females and the gender discrimination against the girl child in access to literacy in a male dominated society. This preference of males over females has been studied keeping in view the information provided by the people in the village. The study was conducted in Dasuha, (242-R.B.), a part of District Faisalabad. Empirical data were collected through anthropological techniques under qualitative paradigms. This article starts with an ethnographical account of the village which includes historical background, general facilities in the village, their social and economic organization. In the later part it will highlight the parental attitudes towards their sons and daughters especially in the field of education. An effort has also been made to find out the changes in the attitudes brought by the development and the awareness created among the parents about the female education.*

**Keywords:** Inheritance, mobility, discrimination, equality, patriarchal,

### INTRODUCTION

Generally in Pakistan parents prefer their sons over their daughters because they are supposed to be the helping hand for the parents. Parents tend to think that whatever they spent on sons is an investment whereas spending over daughters is a waste, because they are considered as liabilities. A hidden fear in the minds of males is that after getting education the females may start interfering in the decision making process. They are kept economically dependent on males no matter how hard they work to contribute to the family's income. Their work is not recognized as a part of contribution to the household economy. They are also deprived of their share of property.

According to Zafar (1991), Mumtaz et al. (1987) and Rehman et al. (1993), the girl child training is by and large considered to be the responsibility of female elder members like mother, grandmother or the elder sisters of the girl. According to Kumari et al. (1990) and Devasia et al. (1991) mothers have to train their daughters in accordance with the social models and ethics assigned for girls. Right from the beginning girls are taught to suppress their feelings and desires, and to act modestly with reserve and self-control. Their mobility is restricted and they are confined in the private domain i.e. the house. The boys on the other hand, receive better treatment, privileges and support from the family members. Eventually, they become more authoritative, and dominant, towards their sisters and then towards their wives later on.

According to Zanden et al. (1990) and Kazi et al. (1991), girls and women are expected to maintain the household, care for children and old and sick members of the family, also, to participate in the economic activities of the household (usually within the household) without remuneration. Men, on the other hand, are expected to earn income and to protect the family

from violence of the outsiders. The girl child is supposed to help in all household chores, which is a full time job.

This entire situation suits the male as it is economically beneficial to them. So to keep the status quo male deprives the female of her right to education. It is not only the education, gender discrimination is visible almost everywhere. Before going towards the empirical findings let's define gender. According to Seymour (1986) and Berg (1973) gender is a basic category by which the social world is organized. It is the social role of being a female or male. They say that it is different from sex, which has to do with the biological characteristics of a person, whereas the gender refers to the social creation of girls, boys, women and men. But the assignment of the gender identity and roles is on the basis of physical characteristics in one way or the other like Calhoun, Light & Keller (1994) in their book, "Sociology", say that, "from the moment a baby is born, it is classified as either a girl or a boy on the basis of physical appearance. They state that biological differences are basic to the destination between male and female. Then they put a rhetoric question that how should people be male or female, because biology leaves a great deal to social construction and answer it by saying that the first time new parents dress their newborn boy in blue and their baby girl in pink, the sexual identity of the child is being socially constructed." According to Calhoun, Light & Keller (1994) "Society establishes a set of cultural expectations for each gender; children are taught to conform to what their society expects of them as either a boy or a girl."

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Methodology of the current research was based upon qualitative anthropological research methods which include socio-economic survey, participant observation, key informant interviews, interviews, case studies and focus group discussions were used to collect empirical data. For socio-economic survey 100 households were selected through simple random sample. We choose two key informants in the village on our personal judgment basis, which knew most of the people in the village and their socio-economic conditions. Participant observation was used in order to get first hand and accurate information about the respondents. In-depth interviews were conducted with the elder members of society to get detailed information. Structured Interviews were used to collect information from the teachers and other working women. Case studies were conducted to get a detailed presentation of data related to different events. The first visit was conducted in 1996, and the second in 2006.

## THE VILLAGE ETHNOGRAPHY

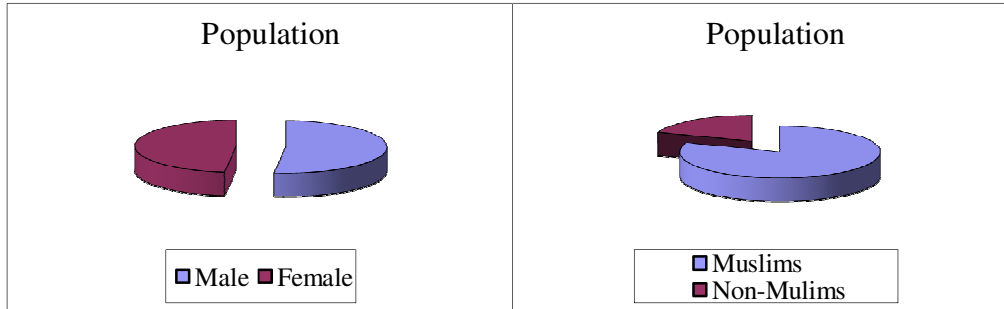
Village Dasuha, District Faisalabad is part of Punjab Province. This particular region is commonly known as Sandalbar. It is situated within 32° and 35° N. and 73° and 75° E. (map of Asia). The village is located at a distance of 15 km in South West of Faisalabad and 2 Km from the Samundri Road. The summers are long and severe and cold weather is short. The most popularly spoken languages spoken in the village is Punjabi and Urdu. The majority of the village population is Muslim. Christians are also present as a minority. Muslims are Sunni by sect. There are 1263 houses in the village and majority of the people live in *pakka* (paved) houses. The total area of the village is 2293 acres, out of which a large portion is under cultivation.

The written historical record of the village is not available. As stated by the informants there was a village named Dasuha in Tehsil Adalia in India before partition. The inhabitants of that village were migrated to this area in 1890. All the land of the village was allocated to them. They pushed the natives *Jangalie* (a beraderi (descent group) mostly living in central Punjab) out of the village who used to live here with their animals. When they got settled here they

started calling this village as Dasuha after the name of their old village. *Suha* means a water channel and *Dasuha* means two water channels. So that particular village may have two water channels because of which it was known as Dasuha.

**Table 1. Population of the Village**

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

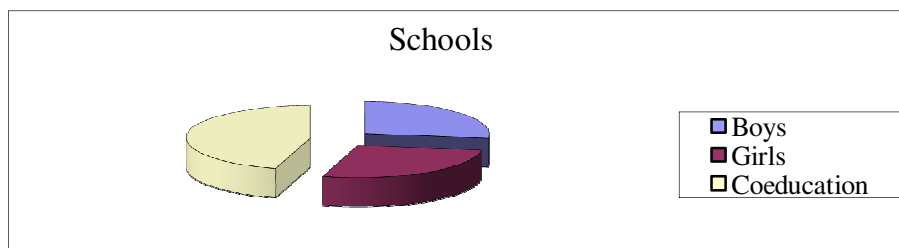


One of the immigrants named Mahr Abadan raise funds through the villagers’ contributions and made a primary school for boys, which is considered to be the first school in the rural areas of Faisalabad. This school is still working as a high school for boys under the name “Islamia Zimindera High School”.

Now the educational facilities for both boys and girls are improved. The total number of schools present in the village is 11. There is one high and two primary schools for boys, one higher secondary and two primary schools for girls provided by the government. There are two middle schools, two primary schools and one nursery school in the private sector providing coeducation for the young boys and girls. The schools in private sector are providing both Urdu and English medium education to the students. The number of male students in English medium sections of the school is more than females. Computer education is also present in Kinder Middle School. People send their sons to the Colleges and Universities in Faisalabad for acquisition of higher education. The literacy rate in the village is 53.30%. Among the males 1020 persons are primary but below metric and 893 are above metric. Among the females 760 persons are primary but below metric and 471 are above metric.

**Table 2. Position of the Schools in the Village**

Schools	For boys	For girls	Coeducation	Status
Higher secondary	-	1	-	Government
High School	1	-	-	Government
Middle School	-	-	2	Private
Primary School	2	2	-	Government
Primary School	-	-	2	Private
Nurseries	-	-	1	Private



The facilities like telephone, bank, electricity, post office, and healthcare are available in the village. The shops are also present in the village. The government has provided the water supply, sanitation and outlets for sewerage/drainage. Usually people have wells or hand pumps in their houses. Some households use electric motors to lift water from the well to the overhead tanks.

The nuclear families are in majority in the village. *Beraderi* (descent group) system prevails in the village and its membership continues only through the males. The exogamy, i.e. marriages outside the *beraderi* is discouraged. The *beraderi* also provides economic aid to its members through the process of *vartan bhanji* i.e. gift exchange system. The money or gifts are given on different occasions like birth, marriage, death etc. The “*purdah*” is strictly observed in the village.

Economic organization of Dasuha has undergone quite a few changes. At first the village had an agro-based economic system, but now the farming resources landholdings have reduced to a low percentage and other non-agricultural activities have been taken up by majority. In order to contribute to the family's income the women have started making home based handicrafts like crochet work, embroidery, stitching etc. besides the household chores. Some of them are also working as teachers in local schools, as lady health workers (LHWs), lady health visitors (LHVs) etc. but they are very few in numbers.

“*Purdah*” is observed in the village at different levels; as *naqab*, i.e. covering the body and face with a big *chaddar* (veil or shawl). As *haya* (shame/shyness), they do not come in front of stranger men and boys; they do not interact with them, and do not go out alone. *Izzat* (honour) is something, which belongs to the men. It is represented by the female and defined in terms of her sexuality. A chaste girl of a good character is supposed to be the one who safeguards her father's, brothers' and in future, her husband's *izzat*.

### **GENDER BIASED ATTITUDES**

The girl child becomes the victim of discrimination and differential treatment right from the time of her birth. The birth of the male child is welcomed with a happy heart whereas that of the girl child is met with depression, especially if she is born after two or three sisters. She is considered as a weakness for the family, she is an economic burden, a moral liability that is defenseless against all types of hazards in life. Discriminatory behaviour of the villagers in the allocation of food resources was observed in majority of the cases. Majority of the respondents too admitted that (under normal circumstances) the males are served food before females. As the village is a patrilineal community, the females are expected to surrender their property rights in favour of their brothers. Girls are given dowry and it is assumed that it is equivalent to their share in land. The preference is given to the males in the sphere of health. The girls are treated locally whereas the boys may be taken to the doctor, especially in the low-income families in which more than two daughters are present, the boy's life is more important as compared to the girls.

The division of labour is based on the classic principle of public and private dichotomy. The work inside the house is supposed to be for the female members of the society, whereas the

work involving outside mobility is the duty of male members of the society. A male is considered the main source of income, which works in the fields or is, employed somewhere else to win bread and butter for the family. Economic activities of the girls are restricted due to *pardah* limitation, which confines them within the bounds of the houses. The discrimination is obvious, as the males are still dominant because the total amount that the women or girls earn in a month's duration, the males earn it in one or two days' labour. The girl child is supposed to help in all household chores, which is a full time job. In most of the households she takes care of the siblings and then doing embroidery, crochet work and stitching to earn money or making dowry. On the other hand the boy's responsibility is usually limited to earn money and to bring grocery etc.

The discrimination at the behavioral level is actually steered by the discriminatory beliefs, which were found in the village too. There is a great difference between the people's ideas and beliefs about the girls and boys. The girls are believed to be more obedient than boys, soft natured, submissive and weaker. The boys, on the other hand, are believed to be very naughty aggressive and strict.

The mobility of a girl is restricted and she is confined in the private domain i.e. the house, while her brothers are given free access to the outside world so that they can acquire skills of their choice. She is made to depend on her parents, brothers or elder relatives for the fulfillment of her requirements like clothes etc. The girl child is brought up in a constant course of discrimination, which is instilled and reinforced in such a way, that the discriminatory behaviour is internalized and accepted as the cultural norms and values of the society.

Mostly the people of the village relate literacy with jobs. Mostly those people are considered educated who can get jobs because of their education. The primary pass females are considered to be well mannered and can take care of their children in a better way. Children are educated through both formal and informal institutions. Among the informal institutions, the family is the crucial for the child's learning in accordance with the social norms and values. The young ones try to imitate their parents unconsciously. The girls endeavor to replicate their mothers, elder sisters or aunts etc. and boys their fathers, elder brothers or uncles.

A girl is taught to act modestly, with reserve and, self-control. The girl child training is by and large considered to be the responsibility of female elder members like mother, grandmother or the elder sisters of the girl. Right from the start, she is taught to suppress her feelings and desires, therefore turning her into a passive, patient and obedient member of the family. In case of disobedience, argument or quarrel over issues like her rights etc., she is chastised and even punished physically by her mother or male members of the family. The boys on the other hand, receive better treatment, privileges and support from the family members. Eventually, they become more authoritative, and dominant, towards their sisters and then towards their wives later on.

It was observed that most of girls and young children spend most of their time with their mothers. They have to train their daughters in accordance with the social models and ethics assigned for girls. Because if any girl swerves from them, or commits an improper action, the relatives and elders of the family hold her mother responsible for the daughter's misbehaviour and accuse her of being incapable of socializing her appropriately.

The relationship between fathers and daughters in Dasuha is mostly of love, fear and respect. The fathers are very strict about their daughter's "*pardah*" and segregation from the unrelated men and boys. Although a strict watch is kept in case of daughters but in case of sons it is

relaxed. The sisters are mostly observed to be very close to each other. They share secrets and are friends. The elder brothers are authoritative, commanding and dominant over the younger siblings. The brothers are supposed to protect and take responsibility of their sisters. They are even allowed to beat their sisters if they don't conform to their bidding,

The peer group plays an essential role in the education of children. The groups of playmates having children less than five years of age usually include children of both sexes, and girls in this age group can also be seen playing in the streets near their houses. The grown up girls, those who are of six years of age and above, generally like to be friend children of their own gender/sex. Girls choose the friends, from the neighbourhood as they are not allowed to go far from their houses. The companionship of girls decreases as they enter the stage of puberty.

The formal agents involved in the process of child education include schools, religious institutions (mosques and "*madrassa*"), mass media etc. In these institutions more emphasis is placed on obedience, which appears to be the basic goal in the informal institutions too. The method of teaching is to make the students memorize lessons by heart, besides reading and writing. The students are punished on not doing the homework given by the teachers, or on creating mischief in the class etc. Religious education, both for boys and girls is given great importance in the village. Majority of the families send their children to the mosques to read and recite Quran. Even those parents who do not send their daughters to school send them to the mosque for this purpose.

The household activities hold an irrefutable importance for girls. They must learn to perform the household chores if they want good repute in the village community and it is assured that they start learning them from the early childhood in which the dolls are used as a means for accomplishing this target. Doll playing play a fundamental role in the girl child education in the village, both in terms of household and social activities. Mother's work reduces, as her daughters grow older. It is the duty of the elder sisters to take care of the family, especially when their mothers are busy, sick or have gone somewhere.

The attitude of the males towards the female education varies from class to class. Majority of the people send their daughter to the schools. The lower class normally stops them after the primary. The attitude of the middle class males is slightly reluctant towards the female education. They allow their daughters, subject to potential, to go up to the higher secondary level. The attitude of the males in the high class towards the female education is most positive. Majority of the girls from this class are educated up to metric level. The males allow them and even arrange for their higher studies. They send them to Faisalabad for their studies. The response of the women towards female education is slightly different from the males. The trends are similar, but the percentage in the favour of education is slightly lacking behind.

In many cases the people said that we treat both sons and daughters equally. We don't have money that is why we are not sending our daughters to school. But actually this is not the case. It is just a socially acceptable answer. When it comes to a son they arrange money even through loans for his studies. They send him to Faisalabad or anywhere else. They invest more on them even if they do not have the potential for their studies. The talented daughters are always treated secondary.

The village community is a classic example of a patriarchal society as the males are the heads of the households, and the fathers, brothers, uncles and husbands have authority in the household matters and they make decisions. The females are not allowed to decide about

their lives and are bound to obey the commands and accept the imposed decisions of their parents, specially the male members of the family.

In this village, the parents' attitude towards their sons and daughters differ. They prefer to have a son rather than a daughter. Many parents think of their daughters as a burden because at the time of marriage, a dowry amounting very largely has to be given to the girls and the girls do not earn money. The parents wish for a son because the daughters have to leave the parents place and stay with their husbands, whereas sons remain with them. The other reason of wishing for a son is that of economic interest. The boy when he grows up has to take the role of going out and earning money. Thus, the parents prefer the boys to the girls. The boys are given education as it is considered a sign of pride and prestige to educate the boys.

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 past. In the past the women had to wear a thick *burkha* (A gown worn by the ladies to cover their head, face and body for *pardah*.) from very young ages and had to cover themselves with it even in summers, but now the girls have started wearing *chaddars* (veils) although they still cover their faces and bodies with them. The use of *burkha* has reduced to 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 now this activity is 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 schools and "*madrassas*" etc. and women can also be seen as L.H.Vs and L.H.Ws so this trend has changed.

Changes have also been observed in the health issues, as the people are gaining greater awareness about health, family planning and related issues through the Lady Health Visitors and media. The people have started taking their females to the hospitals. A change has also appeared in context of education too. 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 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.

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 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 are not educated themselves, but have made their parents send their younger sisters to schools.

Although these are only few of the aspects in which change was seen but these changes were seen in 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.

In spite of all 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 partitioned society where they are assigned with the roles of a domestic worker expected to be submissive, chaste, "*pardah*" 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 works 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.

## CONCLUSION

When babies come into the world, they are innocent, soft and totally at the mercy of their parents. Parents in Dasuha have their own ways and visions regarding their children's education. These ways have different sets of rules and regulations for the new comer. Male child is met with cheers and festivities moreover; he finds life an era of freedom to develop and grow in any direction of his desires and capabilities but arrival of girl child is met with a chilled hush. A life studded with suppressed sentiments and subdued existence awaits her. The stamp of second-class citizen is embossed on her soul in the name of love, concern and security.

In the family, parents differentiate among their children. Mother plays the major role in this differentiation. When a woman is expecting she says that a son should be born. If a son is born she thinks of herself as a great woman who has given birth to a man. This man will continue the lineage of his father. The females even managing the whole of household work are supposed as doing their routine work. The data shows that the males and females in the patriarchal Punjabi society are not rewarded for what they do. Females are the ones who suffer most. They do contribute in the family income in one way or the other but still their contribution is not considered as an extra work.

Then 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 flexible attitude towards their children as it affects the life and personality of the children.

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