

THE GENESIS OF GENDER BIAS IN EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY IN RURAL AREAS OF CHARSADDA DISTRICT

NIAZ MUHAMMAD and ALI ASKAR

Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Peshawar, Peshawar, Pakistan

ABSTRACT

This research paper evaluates the male parents' attitude towards furnishing opportunities to children of two sexes in the sphere of education in Charsadda district. It covers six villages of Charsadda district wherein 60 parents literate and illiterate each in the sampled area were interviewed. Simple Random Sampling was used as a technique for interviewing respondents with interview schedule as tool of data collection. The main purpose of the study was to explore the fundamental causes of discrimination within female education with special reference to analyzing the role of literate and illiterate parents. The findings of the study reveal that illiterate parents are more hesitant in sending their female members to educational institutions for various cultural reasons such as Purdah, status inferiority, superstitious behaviour, non-productive economic status of women, early marriage and girls to be the guests at parents' homes till their marriages. However, literate parents do not take into consideration such cultural restrictions and the research found that all their children, irrespective of disparity, have access to schools.

Key Words: *Genesis, Gender, Charsadda, Pakistan*

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INTRODUCTION

Education has been playing an anchor role in the multidimensional development of country, but there are numerous experienced problems in the domain of its growth in an essentially traditional society. The development process stresses upon the rural men to participate in development-oriented activities, but their efficiency in this respect is certainly based on their educated status, irrespective of gender bias. An international review highlights that developed nations have rapidly moved forward in science and technology after they have improved the educational status of their citizens. Education leads to promoting human civilization, which then fosters manners, etiquettes, justice, liberty, peace and other human values. Education enables the distinction between the ability of value judgment to demarcate between right and wrong; to help identify the hidden facts; to differentiate owns from others; to inculcate a consciousness for acquisition of rights; to provide opportunities for employment; to stimulate for social mobility; and it is to ensure a civil society without crime and corruption.

It is now well understood that education is as necessary for female citizens as for male ones. Islam enjoins on all men and women to get education and gain knowledge, and transmit the same to the existing descendents and subsequent generations. The saying of Holy Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) to "acquire knowledge by every muslim." Enables the opening to all avenues of knowledge. It then becomes common sense to agree that Islam does not impose any sanction on women's education. As Napoleon Bonaparte once remarked "give me the educated mothers and I would give you an educated nation". The support of women's education can be summarized as follows: "an educated woman can better socialize her children, can become a source of bringing prosperity in family and can better manage her family affairs".

It is therefore disappointing to record the access of female students to educational institutions in Pakistan, particularly in the province of Pukhtuns, is not at par with men as a result of various socio-cultural constraints. It appears from this research that ignorant stereotypes are still keeping the women of Pukhtuns away from education. Pukhtuns have their exclusive patterns of life as governing rules, which are locally known as Pukhtunwali. Compliance to Pukhtunwali is thought to reinforce their strength, and violation as a desperate behaviour. In the past therefore, People ridiculed those who sent female members for education opportunities. Educated women faced many consequent impacts situations including less/no chance of marriage and social isolation in their local community as female education was also inclusive to the list of cultural restrictions. However, the increasing rate of education overtime has now resulted in a down sizing of the strength and power of such cultural restriction. Nevertheless, much still needs to be done, as dismal picture emerges from the gender based numerical difference in

school enrolment. According to a report of Directorate of Schools and Literacy, NWFP (2005-2006), the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) at primary level is 64% of the total children within which 73% are boys and 54% are girls. Whereas the GER of Middle, High and Higher Secondary Schools in total is 27 % and out of which 36 % is of boys and 18 % is of girls. It is further added that GER at all levels is more critical in the rural belt of the province and similarly the position of Charsadda district amongst other districts is getting worse. It is pertinent to mention that gender disparities in education are not only in Pakistan but they are found in different countries of the world. According to a report of the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS), the international community made a commitment to eliminate gender disparity in primary education by 2005 and achieve gender equality in education by 2015. The first target has not been met as 72 million of children remained away from schools across the world by 2005, including 57% girls. The present study argued for a correlation between the education of parents and them in turn educating their children. As consequence, the present study has focused on certain gender inequality and stereotypes relating to education in the target areas.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Literate and illiterate male parents constitute the sample unit of the study. They were easily accessed at their houses or land farms. They were approached first and then interviewed randomly, as all respondents had the same probability to stand as units of sample size. 120 parents as total, literate and illiterate evenly, were taken from six villages of the target district. Three villages each in Tangi and Charsadda tehsils were selected for the purpose. 20 respondents being 10 literate and illiterate each from every selected village were interviewed. The selected villages were largely populated in the area and had discriminatory character in respect of female education. An interview Schedule was used as instrument of data collection in view of the accuracy of result from the field. All respondents were very much cooperative in disseminating all kind of information related to the topic. Illiterate respondents did not skip any question after they had them fully explained. Details on village focused data are given in Table I.

Table I. Composition of sample size

S.No	Village	Tehsil	Samples Chosen Randomly From Six Villages
a.	Nisatta	Charsadda	20
b.	Turangzai	Charsadda	20
c.	Tarnab	Charsadda	20
d.	Tangi	Tangi	20
e.	Sherpao	Tangi	20
f.	Mandani	Tangi	20
g.	Total	6x20	120

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results were obtained from data collected on the central theme of discrimination in gender. The key question was asked about their children’s participation in education, and to ascertain various social, cultural and economic reasons relating to people supporting or not supporting female education. The data are explained in Table I - III.

Gendered Based Participation by Children

As mentioned above, information on attainment of education by children of both sexes at different institutions was ascertained from their parents. Data given in Table I analyzes different ratios of trend towards education in educated and non-educated families. According to Table I, all literate parents had male children and they sent them for the attainment of education. So the percentage remained 100. Among these respondents, 54 (90 %) were also sending their female children to schools. The apparent reason, mentioned by 10 % of parents, for not sending female children to schools was the youth of their daughters. The table highlights that the illiterate parents observed a clear gender based distinction in this regard. While 50 out of 60 illiterate parents (83.3 %) sent their male children for education, only 33 (55 %) did so in case of female children. This means that 45 percent illiterate parents denied their female children access education opportunity. The overall position of the target area is that all parents were sending their male and female children at the rate of 91.6 % and 72.5 %, respectively.

Table II. Parents sending their children for education

Parents	No.	Male Children Studying	% age	Female Children Studying	% age
Literate	60	60	100	54	90
Illiterate	60	50	83.3	33	55
Total	120	110	91.6	87	72.5

Source: Field Survey 2006

The above data confirms that discrimination in education of boys and girls with particular reference to non-educated families is being exercised.

Parents' Perception on the Socio-Cultural Reasons Restricting Females Education

Table III shows the respondents' view on the status of some socio-cultural stereotypes, which are deemed to have been restricting female education in the target rural areas. 84 (70 %) of the parents, both literate and illiterate, perceived Purdah (veil) as a restraint in the way of female education. 42 parents (35 %) reflected an anachronistic thinking confirming an old age stereotype that girls being guests in others' homes and consequently cannot contribute financially to their parental homes. 47 (39.2 %) parents viewed the practice of early marriage of girls in target community as a reason of keeping away them from access to education, which results in them either being left out or having a discontinuity of their education. (77.5 %) of the parents endorsed the influence of another stereotype mainly in illiterate families that "educating a woman is for the sake of earning, which degrades her family status in the area". 49 parents (41 %) each regarded no trend of girls' education in the area and superstitious behaviour of the parents towards their educated females as restraining factors. They further elaborated that educated women are not permissive and do not take orders of family members in decent manner.

Table III. Socio-cultural reasons restricting female education

Parents	Purdah	Guest of Others' Home	Early Marriage	Status Degradation	No Trend	Superstitions
Literate	36	08	20	41	24	20
Illiterate	48	34	27	52	25	29
Total	84	42	47	93	49	49

Source: Field Survey 2006

It is concluded that the local people had certain cultural stereotypes, which did not freely allow females to have enabled access to education. The analysis also highlights that non-compliance to the existing structure of society is very difficult for individuals as it is always thought to follow severe criticism of them from the rest of their community.

Economic Factors behind Backwardness of Female Education

Table IV indicates economic factors which reduces opportunities for female education in less or non-facilitated areas. According to data presented in table, 36 parents (30 %) mentioned the critical economic condition of low profiled families as a responsible factor behind restricting female children to access to schools. 52 respondents (43 %) observed the rigid cultural establishment as being the reason for having no opportunity for females to have further employment after they have completed their education stream and such situation discourages their inclination towards education. The second portion of the table indicates respondents' view on the question that an educated girl cannot contribute to family budget. A reasonable number of the illiterate parents i.e. 34 (28 %) and only 15 % literate parents of the total sample size agreed to it. 32 (27 %) were indifferent.

Table IV. Economic restrictions in female education

Parents	Family Poor economic status	%age	Not Economic Asset	%age	Did not agree to both	%age
Literate	16	13	18	15	26	22
Illiterate	20	17	34	28	06	5
Total	36	30	52	43	32	27

Source: Field Survey 2006

It is obvious but necessary to observe that poverty has blocked many ways to development in the area, including education. It is noteworthy that a clear contradiction was observed effective in case of female children. Illiterate parents mainly supported the cultural stereotype about educated women not proving financially contributory to their respective families.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study reflects the continuous power of culturally established perceptions in the circle of illiterate parents, which can be directly held responsible for the continued exercise of gender discrimination in education. The illiterate families involved in this study, do show a hesitation in allowing their female children for access to education at different tiers. However, a positive change in the mental look of the educated parents was observed from the data analysis, as an exercise of gender discrimination on their part was lower than it has been in the past. Stereotyping women's education and employment of educated women as tantamount to shattering observance of *Purdah* (veil), and resultantly non-earning status of them has led to discrimination in education of two sexes. Educated girls were thought to be self-conceited, bluestocking, disobedient to husband's orders and normally deviant to pay proper heed to domestic chores, which were then apprehended to curtail chances of their possible future marriages in respectable families. The tradition, that girls are the 'guests of others' home after marriage' was somewhat supported in the data. Poverty remains as one of the restricting forces. However, this study has observed that the ice of rigidity of illiterate parents has started melting in view of the day-by-day importance of education but remains at a slow pace. In the light of the data and personal observation in the field, the following steps are proposed to enable increased actions against continued gender-based discrimination in education.

- i. The community needs to be mobilised through government and non-government organizations or other related organizations to signify the importance of education by inculcating awareness among the illiterate people in particular. It will help ensure the access of all children, irrespective of gender discrimination, to educational institutions.
- ii. All levels of civil society should come forward to advocate against the false cultural ideas that continue to hinder education attainment by girls at local level. It is not only the responsibility of government to facilitate in different ways or evolve different strategies based on upside down observation to relinquish impediments of the way, but religio-political circles are increasingly also under moral obligation to help minimize the influence of falsely fabricated stereotypes blocking the access of girls to educational opportunities.
- iii. The media, having a hallmark role in putting the nation on the guided track, should endeavour through its various channels to expose the continued blurred status of the cultural restraints and their negative bearings on the development process of country in general and rural communities in particular, and by doing so the struggle towards the planned result will appear. In addition, the increasing power of the electronic media is essential to be accessed in view of its expansive coverage in the illiterate population.
- iv. The government should increasingly create more job opportunities for the educated females. The perceived continued high unemployment rate of females has certainly created ambiguities in the mind of the illiterate parents that female education is fruitless. While the facts challenge this perception, nevertheless, the illiterate mind has been set on such direction and this becomes very hard to change. This research would argue for breakthrough opportunities through locally driven intellectual attempts with the conviction to boost the importance of women education in the activities of better socialization of children, home management and other activities.
- v. It should be confirmed that the majority of the people in the rural areas of the country are living their subsistence mode of life and therefore within limited resources, which means that they hardly afford the additional educational expenses. It is suggested that if monthly stipend is given to the studying girls, that would encourage those with few funds to send their female children to schools.
- vi. The community should be sensitized towards minimizing the customary practice of early marriage. Scientific research has shown that this is not only an injurious practice against human health but also promotes discontinuity of education before its completion by female students. Non-government organizations (NGOs) need to come forward through their Village Organizations (VOs) and Women Organizations (WOs) to continue to engage the local people to concentrate on the negative effects of early marriage. Locally based organizations should also deem it as their prime responsibility for the sake of the betterment of society.

- vii. Various NGOs are working on the question of child empowerment in respect of different activities of life including education. The concept of child empowerment has given an ample opportunity to children to participate in decision-making regarding their education. In simple words, it will give autonomy to a child to better decide about his destiny; and by doing so he will not become a victim of personality absorption and not maintain an illiterate status. NGOs, working on the same theme at national or provincial level, should be motivated to expand their network to the educationally backward areas of target district.
- viii. Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) should be established with the conviction to create proper liaison between teachers and parents in a bid to motivate the formers to send their children, irrespective of sex, to educational institutions. PTAs working already need to be activated for the same purpose. It would be in the interest that annual funding being released to boys and girls schools regularly be conditioned to their efficiency. Efficiency should be evaluated on the basis of achieving a defined target of enrolment.

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