

## **GENDER DISCRIMINATION, TACTICS USED AGAINST FEMALES** (A Case Study of Village Dasuha, District Faisalabad)

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study shows the attitudes of the local people regarding gender discrimination and the tactics or strategies used against the females. Different methods are used during the upbringing, socializing and educating their daughters by means of which the girl child is placed in a subordinate, submissive, self sacrificing, passive and subjugated position. People are still relectant to give the due rights of their daughters which may include food allocation, inheritance, health, division of labour, economic activities and education. This study identifies the ways by which the females are kept deprived from their rights. The efforts have been made to find out the culture perception of parents regarding their daughter's socialization and gender discrimination between female and male children while their grooming. This study may help to find out low participation rate with reference to gender empowerment. There is no financial benefits for parents to invest on their daughters. The main focus of the study is to explore the ways and actual reasons for discrimination with reference to gender.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

When babies come into the world, they are innocent, soft and totally at the mercy of their parents. Discrimination against the girl child mostly begins even before her birth, when the elderly women say to the expecting mother, "Allah putter devay" (may God give you a son), and prevails throughout her life till death. The discrimination, according to the Macmilian Dictionary of Anthropology is, "the differential treatment of persons according to their classification as members of particular categories such as race, sex, age social class etc." It further states that it is distinguished from prejudice, which is the unfavourable or discriminatory attitudes (not actions) towards persons of different categories,

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 and 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, and 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."

Gender discrimination is not a new phenomenon. It was there, when in Arabia, before the advent of Islam, men buried the girl child alive. It is still throbbing in this modern world, when (like in India) female infanticide is being practiced. It prevailed when she was sold in the markets as a slave. It still lingers on when she is trafficked and sold for prostitution. And as if this is not enough, she is criticized, jeered at, and ridiculed in various forms of literature, used as a showpiece in the advertisements and as a colourful, sexy commodity for pleasure in the media.

Gender discrimination, the age-old system of inequality and stereotyping of the role of women, has resulted in the low valuation of a girl child. The parents always pray for a son. This perhaps is the attitude all over the country with a few honourable exceptions. The situation may be worse in the villages where when

the girl is born, there is seldom any joy; a kind of gloom prevails; but the birth of a boy is greeted with elation and pride.

## **LOCALE**

This study was conducted in Village Dasuha (242-R.B.), District Faisalabad. The village is situated at a distance of 15 km from Faisalabad city in South West direction and 2 km from Samundri road from where a branch road leads to the village. According to 1998 population census report of district Faisalabad the total population of Dasuha is 9,557, which includes 4952 males and 4605 females. This total figure includes 7721 Muslims and 1838 Non-Muslims.

## **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.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Parents in Village Dasuha are self-reliant and world wise having 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 stuffed 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.

### **Tactics of Discrimination against Females**

The tactics or strategies used for discrimination against the females refers to the methods used by means of which the girl child is placed in a subordinate, submissive, self sacrificing, passive and subjugated position, a position which is a hundred and eighty degrees the opposite to that of her male counterpart. Not only the males but the females also follow these strategies (both intentionally and unintentionally). They are as follows:

**Education:** In the village, generally the parents deal with their male and female child separately regarding their education. The sons are preferred over the 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 where as spending over daughters is a waste, because they are considered as liabilities, as there is a concept of not being dependent on daughter. Being a patriarchal community, the decision making power is held by the male members of the family. In majority of the houses the males are the heads of the households. Fathers, brothers, uncles or the husbands have authority to make decisions regarding their females' education, where to study and how much to study. Normally the male decision makers stop the females of their families from education earlier because they are more conscious about the "purdah" and the concept of "izzat", which is linked with the females. If a female have to make the decision regarding education of the girls, she may not stop them as early as the males do. A hidden fear in the minds of males is that after getting education the females may start interfering in the decision making process, which is so far male's domain. He does not like any interference in his domain, so he keeps the female less educated. Whenever a question regarding the decision making

power was asked from females of the house they said, "Obviously male and it is their right. They go out of the homes, have interaction with the people and have a better vision, so they can make better decisions." This statement may differ after they get education.

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. It was observed that most of girls and young children spend most of their time with their mothers. 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. 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.

A girl is taught to act modestly, with reserve and, self-control. 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.

**Economic Position:** The females are kept economically dependent on males no matter how hard they work to contribute to the family's income. This aspect is also linked with education and awareness in the sense that majority of girls are kept inside the house, their access to the outside world is limited (they can only watch television or radio) and so they cannot contact directly with the markets in the urban areas. Now, even those girls who do the embroidery,

crochet work and stitching for earning income, for the family, they have to rely on the middleman for taking those finished products to the markets. The middleman only gives them a meager amount of money, which is very less as compared to the money earned by the male members of the family. The males of the household can easily earn in one day what females can earn after a hard labour of the whole month. So discrimination can be seen in this respect too.

The girls who try to contribute to the family's income by doing crochet work and embroidery for their dowry is not given as much importance as is given to the work done by her father or brother for earning income. Majority of the girls do almost all the household work for which otherwise they may have to hire a servant against a heavy salary. But this work is not recognized as a part of contribution to the economy of the household.

**Inheritance:** Although according to Islamic Law, the women and girls are entitled to inherit the land and property, in which they get half of the male's share and the Pakistan's secular or judicial law also advocates women's share in the property, but the traditional practice prevalent in the village deprives them from their legal share in land according to which women are supposed to hand over their share of land in favour of their brothers. The common perception is that the girl is given her share of property in the form of dowry, and if the girl is given her share of land, then she'll take it to her husband's family and the family's property will go out of the hands of the actual owners. Many people think that a woman should be offered her share in the property, but she should not take it, because if she would not take her part in the land then her brothers and parents will take care of her throughout her life. In case of any disaster or catastrophe like the husband's death or maladjustment with the husband or in-laws resulting in separation or divorce, she has to go to her parents and brothers, who support her throughout her life. If she doesn't take her share in the land then her parents and brothers keep on giving her money or gifts on different occasions like Eid, birth of children, marriage of siblings or children, and gets a sack of grain at the time of

harvest. On the contrary, if she does claim her share then she might face social boycott from her family of orientation, because it results in hurting and enraging them so much that they don't take her responsibility anymore. The property of the women, who do not have brothers, doesn't remain in their fathers' family. It becomes a part of their husbands' family and successors. Therefore the women too think it as a fair custom. Some of the respondents said that land "zameen" is like mother and nobody wants his land in that respect to go in others' family.

Now, the discriminatory aspect that arises is that she is deprived of the share of property in her father's house whereas her brothers get that share. On the other hand, when she gets married the dowry, which is given to her, goes to her husband's house. The husband and his family get benefit of that. Her position is still not strong as she lives in his house and doesn't own his property. So it is the male who is the winner in all cases.

**Work:** According to Zanden et al (1990) and Kazi et al (1991) traditional gender division of labour, 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 social spheres are separated into male or public domain, and female or private domain. Relations of power, subordination and dependency or "patriarchy" maintain the gender relations. Rubina Saigol (1994) supports domestic knowledge system which according to her relies on a series of binary distinctions such as good/bad, virtue/vice, high/low, superior/inferior, right/wrong and these divisions follow the patriarchal logic of assigning positive and higher values to men and negative and lower, usually exactly opposite values to women. These positioning become markers of gender identity.

The household work though is apparently easy and light, but it is not so in reality. 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. After that he is free from all responsibilities of the household and can spend rest of the time in the company of his friends or by watching movies, listening songs or resting in his room while her sister is working for his and the family's convenience. If he needs anything, he can just order her and his demands will be fulfilled. Males get a holiday on Sundays from work but there is no off day for the females. The males can skip work for a day or more from their labours if they are ill, but there is no rest for the females unless they are seriously ill and can't move. The greatest tragedy is that all this hard work goes unnoticed, unacknowledged, and unearned.

**Mobility:** Girl's mobility 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. Many girls want to go to Faisalabad for further education and acquiring professional training in embroidery, knitting and crochet work, but cannot do so because of the restrictions on mobility. Although they can study further privately, but that too is not allowed by most of the male members of the family.

Although the mobility of girls, especially the adolescents, is restricted, even then it was observed that they participate in the ceremonies like marriages and engagements. When and if they have to go out, like on marriages or to school, they are not permitted to go out alone and must be accompanied by someone and that too in complete "*pardah*". The girls at this stage though don't go very often to meet friends, relatives and neighbours, but women and young children



keep on coming to their house. In this way contact of girls with the rest of the society is maintained indirectly. The fear of outside world and sabotage of their "izzat" (honour) is infused in their minds. Therefore first of all they do not dare to go out alone, and those who break these rules; the male members of their family may give them even a physical assault.

**Inculcation of Inferiority Complex:** The girls are groomed and brought up in such a way that they stay victims of inferiority complex in comparison with the males around them, throughout their lives. They are made to feel that they are unwanted; as whenever a girl is born, nobody celebrates her birth, whereas when a boy is born, it means great joy and celebration. She is not supposed to be given her share in property, as it is understood that it will be given in the form of dowry, but then she is made to feel unwanted, and is considered to be a cause of worry to her family because of this dowry that her family will have to collect for her. Similarly she being weak and thus being vulnerable to the danger of losing her respect and the honour of her family at the hands of other men is also a cause behind her being the unwanted member of the family.

### **CHANGES DURING RECENT PAST**

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.

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*" from very young ages but now the girls have started wearing "*chadders*". 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.

## CONCLUSION

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. 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 partilineal society where they are assigned with the roles of a domestic worker expected to be submissive, chaste, "purdah" observing, dowry making and ready to be wed off and to nicely settle down in the house of their in laws. A little education with full devotion to household 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.

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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