

## **A Sociological Analysis of Gender Discrimination and Social Status of Women**

**Sociology**

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### **Abstract**

*The present research paper illustrates a summary of overall socio-cultural, religious and political determinants of gender discrimination and low social status of women. There are so many factors responsible for low status of women and discrimination against them. In the present study some of these factors have been examined. The situation of women status and discrimination against them have been analyzed from sociological perspective. A systematic review of literature on the subject has been given. Data has been analyzed through SPSS. A thorough discussion of results has been made from sociologist eye.*

**Key Words:** Gender Discrimination and Social Status

### **Introduction**

The society of Pakistan is known as patriarchal society in the globe. Male dominates women in their whole social life. Men always considers women similar to commodities. He holds the power to sale and purchase them. In order to have more and healthy children fertile women are preferred by man for marriage (Chaudhry, 1987b). There is an inferior attitude by male members towards women which starts from the very moment the girl is born. From her birth women are treated as inferior being in this world. Due to this attitude towards female even mothers can hardly enjoy the birth. Father feels ashamed on new arrival of baby girl in the home. The Pakistani society from its independence has authorized man to keep women backward and control her conduct. Women spent good amount of time in working in the fields in different capacities in the rural areas of the society. Due to their sincere work in family affairs women are considered important but they are not given primary status by customary laws (Khawar and Farida, 1987). There are so

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many factors including non-availability of good infra structural facilities and lower standing of women as compared to man are main hindrances amongst others in playing her role in socio-economic activities. Women in rural areas of Pakistani society lead deplorable social life (Chaudhry, 1964). The conditions in which rural women leads a life are rooted in cultural norms and centuries old customs (Hassan, 1980). Women as compare to men in rural areas are provided less basic necessities of life such as food, clothing, shelter, education and health facilities. One of the main reasons of such conditions for women in rural areas of Pakistan is poverty (Khalid, 1982). Selling of girls to the bride for money is permitted by customs in some parts of the country (Rashida, 1979). Many factors are responsible for the lower socio-economic status of Pakistani women. On one hand women are not provided basic health facilities, education and on the other hand they are deprived of constitutional and legal rights and violence against them (Khan, 1988).

From social scientist point of view it can be concluded that women are deprived of basic facilities like education, health facilities and employment opportunities in their social life. Due to the denial of ownership rights, women are not able to play active role in social and economic development activities. The low status of women and gender inequality as problem is complex and needs a scientific study because the roots of such complex problems are rooted in the history, culture, and traditions of the society. In this paper the complex nature of the problem and its causes have scientifically been explored and discussed.

### **Gender Discrimination and Social Status of women in Rural Sindh**

Sindh being one of the province is also characterized as patriarchal society in the country. Gender discrimination is present in the psyche of both female and male and such psyche has socio-economic factors. In rural Sindh there are two customary laws which create hindrances in the socio-economic development of women; selling of women to bride for money by parents and killing of women in the name of so called honor (Postan, 1973). Sindhi women in rural areas lead deplorable life. Without awareness of their rights to education, health, ownership rights and social mobility. They work for several hours in the fields without monetary gains as compared to men (Soomro, 1977). Baby girls are not welcomed and considered burden on family. Girls are married at very early age which leads them in long fertility period. Which results in their poor health and in rare cases to the death (Shireen, 1979). The status of women in patriarchal system is very low where girls have to take food at last and eat whatever leftover by man in the family. They are also discriminated in getting employment being women they are not employed on higher posts. Therefore women are deprived of education (Mubark, 1983). In Sindhi society men enjoy

a dominant role and status due to the patriarchal nature of it. The same system considers women inferior to men and socialize them to remain obedient to men throughout their life. Women in urban parts of the province enjoy better status and have much more right to education, health, and have rights of ownership (Allana, 1986). The low status of women in the Sindh is deeply rooted in its rigid norms continued from Neolithic Societies. Women are ranked as slaves for men and they cannot move outside the family; in extreme cases they are allowed with prior permission from men. Such conditions in the society have compelled women to lead a life without education and miserable (Panhwar, 1984). Women in the society are economically very poor and their daily life is governed simultaneously by community and tribal codes and family customs. Joint family system is the prominent feature of rural Sindhi society. Minority of the people are in position in the society who can have the opportunity to access safe drinking water and have proper access to health facilities and education.

## **Review of Literature**

### **Gender Discrimination and Social Status in South Asia**

Girls early in their age are taught to remain obedient to men throughout their life in Pakistani and Bangladeshi societies. In the process of socialization of women men always focusses on two things that they (women) should learn about patience and sacrifice of personal matters in their life for men (Jahan, 1975). The research highlights that men in rural areas 70% and in urban areas 80% think that women should be subordinated to men. In the research while analyzing sexual based division of labor; it is revealed women are discriminated socially and economically, yet they can play a crucial role in the socio-economic development of any country. In the conclusion of study researcher maintains that the main causes of gender discrimination and low status of women in the South Asian region are lack of economic power, lack of education, lack of awareness about their rights and the century old traditions and norms among other factors (Arputhamurthy, 1990).

In every society of the South Asian countries the gender discrimination and low status of women is observed by researchers and academia (Sattar, 1990). The researcher in research observes saying that as compared to men women are paid no attention in their illness and are not taken to hospitals. They are only admitted in the hospitals in severe conditions. Such attitude towards women always results in such environment where usually they suffer from life threatening diseases. The diseases from female children mostly suffer are measles, diarrhea, and respiratory infections. In the desire of male child parents

even stop girl babies from breastfeeding in their early age in order to get pregnant again. The little older female children or women in the family usually take meal in the last or sometimes only eat the leftover food by men. Women in the families which are poor economically never access the nutritious fats, vegetables, meat, egg and mild. These factors according to the author are found everywhere in the ladder of socio-economic classes of the South Asian countries.

### **Preference for son**

The facts and figures of newborns in the region indicate that boys are always given preference over girls. In South Korea, China and India the situation is alarming. The data shows that 9 out of 1000 born or expected to be born are missed. The technology has helped parents in identifying prenatal sex which results in abortion of identified girls. Genocide of girls through abortion is common practice in the China, India and Pakistan. Boys are considered useful entities by parents and girls are considered burden and less useful for the family in these countries (Edlund, 1999). Women from their birth are unwelcomed by parents, tribe and society at large in almost all countries of the South Asia. In the conclusion we can conclude that women are not given preference at all, therefore, they are treated as secondary citizens in the family. Such attitude has made their life miserable they are deprived of nutrition, good food, and medical care and love and affection.

### **Purdah a symbol of respect for women or cause of low status and gender discrimination**

Studies on the status of women reveal that the purdah observer women are less socially developed than non observer women. It does not mean at all that purdah only has negative impact on women. It has many positive impacts on social life of women as well. It helps women to feel secure and raises her social status too. According to Mason and Smith (2003) women are facing gender discrimination and backwardness mainly due to Purdah observance. The researchers conducted a comparative study on social status of women in family system and outside of family in five Asian countries India, Pakistan, Malaysia, Thailand and Philippines. The research revealed that housewives are less developed and rank low in status as compared to working women who are more developed and rank high socially. In the concluding of the research they argue that non observing women can find more job opportunities and are more socially developed than the women who observe purdah lead a miserable life.

Pakistani women are not allowed outside the family and segregated from the world outside the family in the name of Purdah observance (Jones *et al.*, 2006). Due to purdah, in the view of authors, women are not economically sound because they are not allowed to participate in income generating activities outside family. They in their final arguments say that purdah is symbol which indicates that women are socially not developed and they are dependent on their males in their all aspects of socio-economic life.

According to Desai, (1994) purdah means no social mobility for women in the society and no interaction with other members of society other than family. Further, author is of the opinion that purdah does not allow women to have resources and it creates lots of problems (if any) to control over them. Sociologically social mobility is considered one of the important factors of high social status in the society but unfortunately according to the author women are not given freedom to social mobility which ultimately, results in female low status and discrimination against.

The other studies reveal that women who observe purdah are less harassed on the other hand women who do not observe purdah are vulnerable to sexual harassment (Abu-Odeh, 1993). While concluding the author opines that women who observe purdah feel secure while traveling and are not looked at by men with purpose. Veil or Purdah is considered a symbol of respect for women (Fernea, 1998). The purdah observer women can easily get help from male in many activities without any fear of harassment. Further the writer mentions that purdah dedicates power and authority to women in their social life in society.

The above cited literature reveals that purdah has both negative and positive impacts on women in their social life. On one side authors argue women are hindered in many aspects of their socio-economic life and on the other hand few others give their opinion that there exist misconception regarding purdah. They say actually, purdah is characterized as sign of respect for women in the society. Women always cash this symbol of respect in their safety and security while she is on social mobility outside family.

## **Methodology**

The present research basically is exploratory in its type. A sample size of 384 was selected from rural Sindh through multi-stage sampling methods. Data from the respondent was collected through questionnaire method. Data was analyzed through SPSS. Hypotheses were tested through chi-square test.

## Discussion of results

### Social status of women

Sindhi society is patriarchal society. Male governs women life through culture. The culture in Sindhi society gives priority son over girl in providing all basic needs such as education, nutrition and health facilities. Joint family system is the main feature of culture in the rural areas of Sindh. The family is being run under the umbrella of patriarchy. This system gives right and authority to men to decide fate of women. In rural Sindh women have very poor status in socio-cultural norms the study revealed.

**TABLE NO 1 TYPE OF FAMILY (ACCORDING TO STRUCTURE)**

Type of Family	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Nuclear	84	21.9	21.9
Joint/Extended	300	78.1	100.0
Total	384	100.0	

Data in table no 1 can be described as that the majority of women live in joint family system and under the dominancy of man where they are not allowed to demand about their personal desires.

**Table No. 2 Type of Family (According To Authority)**

Type of Family	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Matriarchal	47	12.2	12.2
Patriarchal	337	87.8	100.0
Total	384	100.0	

Data in table no 2 is self-explanatory showing that majority of women live in houses where the affairs of family are govern by male members. Few of them live in houses where they have the authority to decide and plan about their life without male interference. In patriarchal families women are socialized that they possess secondary position in the family. The aforementioned data is supported by the study of Jahan, (1975) conducted on Bangladesh and Pakistan in which the results denote that women in their early age are socialized that they have to remain patience and be always ready to sacrifice their personal life for men. It is also taught women when they are young to remain obedient to men.

**TABLE NO 3 SONS ARE PROVIDED BETTER NUTRITION THAN GIRLS IN THE FAMILY**

Response	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	209	54.4	54.4
To some extent	91	23.7	78.1
No	84	21.9	100.0
Total	384	100.0	

Data in above table no 3 denotes that more than half of women from sample agreed on the fact that sons are given better nutrition than girls in their homes. The data is self-evident in proving the fact that women are ranked low in the structure of society.

### **Son Preference over girl**

The social system in Sindhi rural society is patriarchal in which baby boy is given priority over baby girl. This system does not allow women to lead a smooth life and it creates hindrances in their social development. Female child is unwelcomed and they do not enjoy her birth. Because girls are known as burden on the economy and liability on the family. In Such environment women always rank very low and compelled to live as subordinate to man.

**TABLE NO 4 THE CELEBRATION OF FEMALE CHILD IN THE FAMILY**

Response	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	128	33.3	33.3
To some extent	70	18.2	51.6
No	186	48.4	100.0
Total	384	100.0	

Data in the table no 4 shows that majority of women do not celebrate female birth in their family and tribe. And thirty five percent of the women from the sample of the study say that there is mix reaction about the celebration of birth of baby girl in the family. It can be concluded that baby girls are not welcomed in the family in rural Sindh.

**TABLE NO 5 MORE LOVE FOR SONS**

Response	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	243	63.3	63.3
To some extent	80	20.8	84.1
No	61	15.9	100.0
Total	384	100.0	

The data in table no 5 reveals that the majority of the women form the sample agreed with the question that sons are more loved than girls in their family. This attitude of loving more sons has negatively affected social life of women.

### **Observing purdah**

The women who observe purdah are less socially developed than women who does not observe.

**TABLE NO 6 PURDAH**

<b>Purdah Garment</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>329</b>	<b>85.7</b>	<b>85.7</b>
<b>To some extent</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>9.4</b>	<b>95.1</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

The data in the table no 6 reveals that a huge number of women in the sample observe purdah as obligation on them in their culture. The purdah has crippled women from accessing the education, health and economic opportunities. When women denied from these necessities of life in the name of purdah it results their low standing in the structure of the society.

**TABLE NO 7 MAIN REASON FOR THE PURDAH**

<b>Reason For Purdah</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
<b>Religion</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>18.5</b>	<b>18.5</b>
<b>Tribal Tradition</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>13.0</b>	<b>31.5</b>
<b>Demand of family</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>19.5</b>	<b>51.0</b>
<b>Social environment</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>49.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Data in the table no 7 denotes that majority of women wear purdah as social obligation. The environment is man made it means male dominancy is the main reason for observing purdah in the rural Sindh. Because male always wants female subordination.

**RESULTS OF HYPOTHESIS TEST  
CONTINGENCY TABLE NO 1**

1. **Objective:** To Understand the Jirga System and its Impact on Social Life of Women in Rural Sindh.

2. **Hypothesis:**

**H<sub>0</sub>:** Influence of tribalism on family decision making as an indicator of under development has no role to promote social development of women in rural Sindh.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Influence of tribalism on family decision making an indicator of under Development has a significant and positive role to prevent Social Development of Women in rural Sindh.

3. **Data set:** Comparing groups (Jirga System & Social Development).

4. **Type of observation:** Unpaired.

5. **Type of variable:** Categorical (Nominal).

6. **Sample:** Large.

7. **Test:**  $\chi^2$  Test (Chi-square test for Independence)

8. **Significance Level:** 0.05

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	10.388 <sup>a</sup>	2	.006
Likelihood Ratio	11.120	2	.004
Linear-by-Linear Association	9.567	1	.002
N of Valid Cases	384		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 22.42.

Pearson Chi-Square Value	( $\chi^2$ computed value)	<b>10.388</b>
Degree of Freedom	<b>2</b>	
P- Value	<b>.006</b>	
Significance level at	<b>0.05</b>	

As the significance level (**0.05**) is high than the P value (**0.006**) therefore, the null hypothesis can't be accepted by researcher. As a result it is concluded that there exists a relationship between Jirga System & Social Development of women in Rural Sindh. In other words the computed value **10.388** is larger than the tabulated value **5.99**; therefore, null hypothesis is rejected. **10.388** is the calculated value of chi-square drawn from Table including **2** degrees of freedom. That indicates **H<sub>1</sub>**: is accepted and **H<sub>0</sub>**: is rejected. The p-value is zero, therefore, the degree of association between two variables i.e. Jirga System & Equal Social Development of Women in Rural Sindh is also strongly interconnected. (Ahmed, 20013)

### CONTINGENCY TABLE NO 2

- 1. Objective:** To Analyze the Role of Patriarchal Family System in Social Development of Women in Rural Sindh.
- 2. Hypothesis:**
  - H<sub>0</sub>:** Patriarchal family system as a factor has no role to prevent social development of women in rural Sindh.
  - H<sub>1</sub>:** Patriarchal family system as a factor has significant and positive role to prevent social development of women in rural Sindh.
- 3. Data set:** Comparing groups (The Family Authority & Social Development).
- 4. Type of observation:** Unpaired.
- 5. Type of variable:** Categorical (Nominal).
- 6. Sample:** Large.
- 7. Test:**  $\chi^2$  Test (Chi-square test for Independence)
- 8. Significance Level:** **0.05**



is prominent feature of patriarchal society. In simple words women possess low status and discriminated in patriarchal system through Jirga system.

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