The Pakistan Development Review
31:4 Part II (Winter 1992) pp. 621–635

The Cultural Conception and Structural Perpetuation of Female Subordination: An Examination of Gender Relations among the Populations of the Chalt-Chaprote Community in the Nager Valley of Northern Pakistan

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This paper examines the subordination of women by men among the populations of the Northern Areas of Pakistan. The examination is undertaken with reference to the Chalt-Chaprote community in the Nagar Valley, where fieldwork was conducted in 1989-90. Hence, we:

(a) Analyse the manner in which the subordination of women is manifested, and reinforced during different socioeconomic activities; and
(b) Determine the effects, or lack of effect, on the status and role of women, of changing conditions (as a consequence of increased incorporation of the region in which the community is located, within the political economy).

SOCIAL MANIFESTATION OF FEMALE SUBORDINATION

The subordination of women by men, is socially manifest in numerous instances and symbols. Women for instance, are visibly absent from any position of authority, leadership, or decision-making, whether it be the level of the household, the village, or the community. Descent among the population of this area moreover, is patrilineal i.e. children belong to the lineage of their father. Residence, of preference, is also patrilocal.

Except for the Women's Organisation (which is a corollary to the Village Organisations instituted by the Agha Khan Rural Support Programme, and a later development), women are not members of any of the formal and informal organisations or the levels of authority operational within the community. As members and office-bearers of the WOs as well, women are obliged to depend upon men of their household for the keeping of accounts, and for any contact

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they may have with men of the outside world. Adult women are either illiterate, or Quran literate (since formal education is a limited and recent phenomenon, and formal female education even less so). Their mobility is furthermore subject to supervision and control by men of their kin group, in respect of the socially sanctioned seclusion women are required to practice.

Hence, a girl is constrained from attending school if there is not one in the vicinity of her household, and particularly for lack of an all-girls school. These constraints are in addition to the preference given to boys over girls, for formal education (see Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1

Percentage of Literacy by Nature and Gender

Economic Strata	Formal			Informal		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Rich	47.8	72.7	27.3	52.2	25	75
Middle Income	54	88	12	46	30.5	69.5
Poor	77	94	6	23	40	60
Total	59.6	84.9	15.1	40.4	31.83	68.16

Restricted mobility is also responsible for the total absence of women from the rural-urban migration figures of the community given in Table 3. A woman's world is thus primarily restricted to her household, or the fields in the vicinity of her household. Within the community as well, women cannot visit their natal family or other members of the kin group without the permission of the patriarch of their household. Women furthermore, do not make the tools they use in productive activities; they cannot directly acquire these tools from the artisans of the community; or purchase them in the market, on account of the avoidance of interaction with men of the non-kin group. They are therefore, obliged to be dependent on men of their household to furnish them with these implements.

Restricted mobility may limit girls from going to school, or from venturing outside, or within the community unchaperoned (for instance, to collect fuelwood or timber from the forest;[1] or accompany herds to the alpine pastures during summer), but female role in productive processes exceeds that of the males in terms of the intensity, and length of labour. A girl, as of 9 years of age begins

[1]In some villages of the Northern Areas, women have been observed to also collect fuelwood from the forest (see for instance, Caroe, 1986).

Table 2

Percentage Formal Literacy Level By Gender, and Economic Strata

Economic Strata	Primary			Middle			Secondary			Intermediate			Graduate			Masters		
	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F
Rich	50	45.45	54.54	18.18	100	–	18.18	100	–	4.54	100	–	9.09	100	–	–	–	–
Middle Income	58.5	83.7	16.3	14.8	100	–	9.25	100	–	7.4	100	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Poor	88.2	93.3	6.7	–	–	–	11.8	100	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Total	65.56	74.15	5.84	10.99	66.66	–	13.07	100	–	3.98	66.66	–	3.03	33.33	–	–	–	–

Table 3

Percentage Rate and Type of Migration Per Economic Strata

Economic Strat	Rate of Migration	Rate of Literacy	Level of Literacy					Nature of Occupation		
			Graduate	Intermediate	Matric	Middle	Primary	Salaried Job	Commerce	Wage Labour
Rich	100	100	40	20	10	5	25	75	25	–
Middle Income	38	65	–	30	20	–	50	70.6	17.6	11.8
Poor	57.1	53	–	–	20	60	20	37.5	12.5	50
Total	65.03	32.66	13.13	16.66	16.66	21.66	31.66	61.03	18.36	20.6

to contribute to domestic labour. She begins by helping in caring for her younger siblings. As of 13-14 years of age, she becomes additionally active in productive work, and begins to contribute to household work as well, which includes cooking, cleaning, washing etc.

Tables 4, 5, 6, 7 show the participation by gender involved in the various operations of the different processes of the forms of production practiced in the area. It may be noticed that except in case of crop cultivation (in which women however, undertake either almost exclusively the tedious and lengthy weeding and winnowing operations, or whether they share in all the other operations, except ploughing and sowing), women contribute more time and labour than men, to pastoralism; horticulture; and crafts. All the operations involved in the cultivation of vegetables moreover, are undertaken exclusively by women. Agricultural work is in addition to household work and child care. The latter takes an average of 8.05 hours every day and continues throughout the year (see Table 8). Thus, women contribute an average of 2378.8 hours every year to productive activities, as compared to men who spend 2047.27 hours (as shown in Table 9). This is in addition to an average of 8.05 hours a day to household work and child care.

The secondary status attributed to women also accounts for the fact that despite constituting almost half the population of the community (there are 50.7 percent males as compared to 49.3 percent females); contributing more to agricultural labour than men; and undertaking the entire household work almost exclusively; she is neither welcomed at birth with the same ceremony as a boy[2], nor is she expected to claim the property to which she is entitled, at the time of

[2]The birth of a girl goes unnoticed. The birth of a boy in contrast, is celebrated by the firing of guns in the air, and the distribution of a drink of wheat flour, melted butter, and suger, called *sharbat*. The head shaving ceremony called *aquiqa*, which is an Islamic *rite*, and follows a couple of days later, engenders the sacrificing of two goats for a boy, as compared to one goat for a girl.

Table 4

Percentage Participation by Gender and Average Time Spent on Horticulture

Division of Labour by Gender	Land Preparation		Planting		Manuring and Fertilizing		Watering		Spraying		Fruit Picking		Drying		Storing	
	hrs/d	ds/yr	hrs/d	ds/yr	hrs/d	ds/yr	hrs/d	ds/yr	hrs/d	ds/yr	hrs/d	ds/yr	hrs/d	ds/yr	hrs/d	ds/yr
Male																
Time Spent	3.55	4	3.66	2.91	4	1.5	3	18	2.4	1.1	2	3.1	–	–	1	1
Percentage	61.76		68.29		13.13		15.0		100		11.9		–		5.12	
Female																
Time Spent	5	4	3	2	3.6	2.2	1.95	38	–	–	3.6	4.1	2.42	11.38	2	3.93
Percentage	8.82		2.43		56.75		52.5		–		40.47		97.43		92.3	
Collective																
Time Spent	4.6	3.4	2	3	3.5	3.1	2.71	2.08	–	–	3	16.4	1	6	1	1
Percentage	29.41		29.26		29.72		32.5		–		47.61		2.56		2.56	

Table 5

Percentage participation by Gender and Average Time Spent on Crop Cultivation

Division of Labour by Gender	Land Preparation		Ploughing		Seeding		Fertiling		Watering		Weeding		Harvesting		Threshing		Winnowing		Transportation		Storing		Spraying		Grinding	
	hrs/d	ds/yr	hrs/d	ds/yr	hrs/d	ds/yr	hrs/d	ds/yr	hrs/d	ds/yr	hrs/d	ds/yr	hrs/d	ds/yr	hrs/d	ds/yr	hrs/d	ds/yr	hrs/d	ds/yr	hrs/d	ds/yr	hrs/d	ds/yr	hrs/d	ds/yr
Male																										
Time Spent	5	2	5.1	6.1	2.5	2.94	2.42	3.57	4	18	3	5	5.78	8.89	2.1	1.88	3.2	5.2	3.33	3.16	3.8	3.4	2.06	2.06	4.25	6
Percentage	33.33		97.67		86.22		36.58		13.33		2.32		13.88		58.39		7.68		31.9		27.69		93.34		27.69	
Female																										
Time Spent	6	3	–	–	–	–	2.0	3.0	3	24	3.75	14.68	–	–	2	3	4.08	5.5	3	3	2.25	2.75	–	–	4.6	9
Percentage	26.19		0.0		0.0		12.19		20.0		95.23		0.0		2.32		89.75		7.45		30.76		0.0		30.76	
Collective																										
Time Spent	3.75	3.12	4.1	5	2	3	2.7	3.4	3.4	22.1	4.47	32.4	5.4	8	3.6	2	2	1	3.6	3.3	2.7	2.8	2	1	4.4	14.8
Percentage	40.47		2.32		13.88		51.2		66.66		2.32		86.44		39.28		2.52		60.48		41.02		6.66		41.02	

Table 6

Percentage Participation by Gender and Average Time Spent on Livestock Raising

Division of Labour by Gender	Graz-ing		Grass Cutting for Storage		Fodder Fetching		Feeding Crop Residve		Milking		Butter Making		Shear-ing		Wool Process-ing		Sheep Yarn Making		Goat Yarn Making	
	hrs/d	ds/yr	hrs/d	ds/yr	hrs/d	ds/yr	hrs/d	ds/yr	hrs/d	ds/yr	hrs/d	ds/yr	hrs/d	ds/yr	hrs/d	ds/yr	hrs/d	ds/yr	hrs/d	ds/yr
Male																				
Time Spent	2	240	6	4	3	240	1	120	1	160	–	–	2.69	3.15	–	–	–	–	3.9	33.5
Percentage	2.85		11.76		20.0		16.66		3.12		0.0		96.6		0.0		0.0		100	
Female																				
Time Spent	3	240	4	17.5	2	240	1.6	120	1	160	1.4	25.7	–	–	3.4	6.46	4	58.6	–	–
Percentage	17.14		32.35		64.0		58.33		84.37		82.75		0.0		90.0		90.0		0.0	
Collective																				
Time Spent	4	240	4.12	19.5	1	240	1	120	1	180	2.6	28	2.0	3.1	4	12	3	60	–	–
Percentage	80.1		55.88		16.0		25.0		12.5		17.24		3.4		10.0		10.0		0.0	

Table 7

Average Time Spent by Women on Vegetable Cultivation

S. No.	Process Involved	Time Spent	
		Days/Year	Total Hrs Spent
1.	Land Preparation	2.88	10.08
2	Seeding	1.27	1.96
3.	Manuring	1.72	2.58
4.	Watering	25.5	25.5
5.	Vegetable Picking	10.72	14.25
6.	Drying	11.58	17.02
7.	Storing	1.44	1.15

Table 8

Average Time Spent by Women on Household Work

Sr. No.	Process Involved	Time Spent per Day in Hours
1.	Cooking	4.2
2.	Cleaning	1.08
3.	Washing	1.52
4.	Feulwood Fetching	1.25
5.	Child Caring	–
	Total	8.05

Table 9

Time Spent by each Gender on Different Agricultural Processes

S. No.	Process Involved	Total Days Spent by			Total Hours Spent by		
		Male	Female	Collective	Male	Female	Collective
1.	Crop Cultivation	68.2	67.93	101.92	308.65	235.9	406.28
2.	Horticulture	31.61	65.61	53.7	95.5	156.05	145.05
3.	Raising Livestock	800	868.26	902.6	1643.12	1914.34	1887.34
4.	Vegetable	–	55.11	–	–	72.54	–
	Total				2047.27	2378.83	2438.67

marriage, if she has brothers, and particularly if they are poor.[3]

Another example of the structural subordination to which women are subject, is visible in the dietary behaviour of men and women of the community. Women not only eat after men, but they also tend to eat the left-overs. Besides, they, more than men, are expected to practice restraint in food deficit situations. Malnutrition, and lack of timely modern medical treatment, among other reasons, are partially responsible for the high mortality rate among women of the reproductive ages. (See the World Bank Operations Evaluation Report 1987). Finally, unlike men, women have little, or no leisure time, and practically no recreational activity. Men, on the contrary, (whether engaged only in agricultural production, or whether partially or totally engaged in monetary employment), find time to congregate and exchange pleasantries. Moreover, polo, for which the area is renowned, is played only by men, as is volley-ball. Not only do women not engage in sport, they also do not dance, as do men, during the ceremonies accompanying the rites of passage.

IMPLICATION OF CHANGING CONDITIONS FOR WOMEN

The changes that the community has undergone either directly or indirectly, since incorporation of the Northern Areas within the Federally Administered areas in 1972, have had a bearing (whether positive or negative) on the labour contributed by women to the domestic unit. The status of women or the concepts characterising her status, however have in no way been affected.

The facility of piped water has significantly reduced the time and labour women of the household had to spend in fetching water, several times a day. From sources sometimes several kilometers away.

The introduction of threshers (with partial mechanisation of agriculture) have considerably eased the labour, both men and women had to contribute to threshing wheat. Maize however, continues to be threshed manually in the double cropping zone (below an altitude of 2300 m). Since this operation is undertaken exclusively by women, there has therefore been no change in the time and labour women are required attribute to this operation.

Similarly, weeding, which is a tedious and lengthy operation (continuing for the better part of the germination period, for both the main crops of the area

[3]According to Islamic law (*shariat*) cited by the community, a woman inherits one-third of her father's moveable and immovable property (in this case, land, livestock, household goods etc.), while her brother inherits the remaining two-third. In actual practice, a woman is socialised to exercise the benevolence to forego her claim. She is thus socially obliged to abandon the rights she is ideally recognised as having.

1. Adequately equipped, and more widespread modern health facilities at the local level, which include a resident lady doctor, so that timely formal health care, to some extent, can control the high adult female mortality rate.
2. More widespread and separate schools for girls. These are likely to have a significant impact on formal female education, since such institutions will not challenge the segregation and restricted mobility to which females are subjected;
3. Institutional strengthening of the separate village cooperatives for women by their linking with women's organisations at the regional and national level. This would encourage independence and self-reliance among women, and make a more effective functioning of their Organisation possible;
4. Increase in the posts of activities within the WO's to include members from the depressed economic strata. A more democratic representation within the office-bearers and members of the WO, will have a more widespread and effective impact of proposed facilities at the local level;
5. Agricultural credit, and concessions on agricultural facilities (such as weeding sprays, use of threshers etc.). This would encourage their more widespread use, particularly by the depressed economic strata. Easy access to, and use of technology, would meaningfully reduce some of the work women do;
6. Training to women in the skill and use of improved agricultural implements and inputs, as are men. This is likely to encourage self-reliance among women, and partially reduce their dependence on men; and
7. Training to men in child care (in which they help), and the new forms of production introduced in the area (such as vegetable-growing and poultry). Some of the pressure on female labour will be released, if the workload is shared by both sexes.

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Comments on "The Cultural Conception and Structural Perpetuation of Female Subordination: An Examination of Gender Relations among the Populations of the Chalt-Chaprote Community in the Nager Valley of Northern Pakistan"

I read the paper with great interest. I commend the authors for making an excellent attempt at introducing us to these far-flung areas of the country through their research. The social, economic, cultural and religious portrayal of the Chalt-Chaprote community in the Northern Areas is detailed and extremely interesting. However, the overall feeling one gets from this portrayal is that this could be a description of any village, or even certain urban communities, of this country. After reading this paper I am anxiously awaiting the larger study, from which this paper is derived.

My comments focus on 3 major points, which may prove useful:

1. The stated objective of the paper is to determine the impact of the gender hierarchy of the supernatural forces on the social behaviour of the community, especially regarding the gender hierarchy in socio-economic life. I feel that the paper has failed to determine such a relationship. It may be because the authors took an overly simplistic approach to a complicated problem. I must confess that I do not have the comparative advantage in this field and therefore I am unable to suggest an alternative methodology. However, I would like to point out the logical inconsistency in the argument. As mentioned earlier, the socio-economic characteristics of the Chalt-Chaprote community are no different from what prevails in the other regions of this country, and in fact the South-Asia subcontinent (e.g., women have limited access to formal education and health facilities, low priority work, no decision-making power, denial of rights in inheritance, dowery, etc.). The female subordination and gender hierarchy is much more universal a phenomenon than being specific to the Chalt-Chaprote, and prevails in a wide spectrum of religious beliefs. Thus, attributing the female subordination in real life solely to the gender hierarchy of supernatural forces may not be quite correct.

(In this regard, it may have been more apt to include, if possible, a comparison of this community with a similar community but without the prevalence of the beliefs in supernatural hierarchy in the latter, and then test for supernatural to real world relationship).

On the contrary, the beliefs are generally formed and perpetuated by real

life phenomena. I feel that the gender hierarchy of supernatural forces, in all probability, is based on the occurrences which happened in the daily lives of the ancestors of the community, perhaps centuries ago. The underlying assumption of 'frailty' of women may be a result of years of adaptation to the biological phenomenon of bearing and rearing the children, reinforced by the male attitude of dominance derived from the support the female needs at that particular phase of her life.

2. If the basic aim was to show that women perform as much physical work, if not more, than the men then the quantitative exercise leaves a lot be desired. Not only that the 'collective' category conceals a lot of information about the amount of work undertaken by each gender, but also that Table 9, on which the main conclusion is based, is derived by adding the products of the number of hours worked and the average number of days worked in each activity. It appears from Tables 4–8 that the average is calculated only for those persons (men or women) who were involved in that activity and not as an average of all men and all women whether they have performed that activity or not[1].

In order to illustrate the problem let me give an example. Suppose that 10 women worked for a total of 80 days during the year in a given activity, while 100 men worked for 600 days on the same activity, (say) for 5 hours each. The average number of hours calculated according to the authors' methodology would be 40 and 30 for women and men, respectively. While the true picture is that men spent 3,000 hours whereas women spent only 400 hours on that activity.

Therefore, some approximation of the labour force participation rates may have been helpful. This methodological problem, which perhaps is due to the questionnaire design, has led to the unbelievable result that men work (on the average) for 5.6 hours per day for every day of the year (assuming that they do not perform household chores at all), while women work (including the household chores) for 14.6 hours per day every day (i.e. 160 percent more than men).

3. Lastly, the exclusion of number of activities, where men participation can be assumed to be more pronounced, has given the analysis an obvious bias.

[1]The form of the tables suggest that during the survey, questions about gender participation, average number of days worked and hours per day were asked at the household level (i.e. the respondent was asked to provide the information including that of the average) rather than collecting the information about time consumption by each individual on the household roster. If this in fact is the case, then not only are these variable measured with some degree of error, but also that the average number of days cannot be aggregated across households without weighting them with the proportion of men, women or the persons in working age group in the household to the overall males, females or (working) population (depending upon whether the activity is performed by males, females or collectively) before adding these up to get the overall average.

The analysis tends to concentrate on agricultural and related activities only. Gauging from the level of development of the area in the field of education, it is highly improbable that there would be no non-agricultural productive activity within the community. These activities include commerce (selling of produce and purchase of basic necessities); construction (of dwellings, roads etc.); teaching (formal of informal); and other services etc.

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