

Purdah, Mobility and Educational Opportunities for Women

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Abstract

This paper highlights the multiplicity of women's views on purdah, mobility and educational attainment. Based on qualitative research in a small village, Chah Munshi Wala, in Multan district it highlights how women exhibit agency from within patriarchal constraints. In this they make use of religious rhetoric on purdah as well as the obligatory nature of education for all Muslim women and men. Purdah observance ensures the possibility to move out into the public space with relative freedom easing obstacles in the path of educational attainment. In conclusion the paper calls for viewing these women and their support for purdah within the context of their particular social positioning and not dismiss it as an internalization of patriarchal norms.

Keywords: *Pakistani Women, Purdah, Educational Attainment, Agency of Muslim Women.*

Introduction

There has been much debate around purdah and Muslim women within national and international contexts. To add to some of these debates, this particular paper looks at women's varying views on purdah and how these have a bearing on their mobility and educational attainment in a small village, *Chah Munshi Wala*, in Multan district. Couched in religious justifications and at times restrained by cultural imperatives, women in *Chah Munshi Wala*, try to make the most of the opportunities made available to them through the use of purdah. Where they give religious justification for veiling, they employ the same justification for access to education. Their insistence on purdah being important for religious observance may seemingly reinforce and strengthen patriarchy. But increased mobility and educational attainment in the long run also allows them to bargain with the oppressive system (Kandiyoti, 1988). Also their insistence on purdah being as important for men as it is for women may in many ways be an inadvertent outcome of their engagement with multiple world views due to increased mobility and educational attainment.

Review of Literature

Feminist anthropologists, sociologists as well as political scientists have long dabbled with the issue of veiling in Muslim communities either in passing or in detail depending upon the focus and context of their research (See Moghissi, 2000; Jeffery, 1979; Kandiyoti, 1988; Mahmood, 2001; Iqtidar, 2011; Mirza, 2002; Malik, 2010 & 2017). Three streams seem to emerge through this literature:

- i: Purdah as a symbol of oppression
- ii: Purdah as a strategy to challenge patriarchy or capitalist consumerism
- iii: Purdah as a religious value espoused by women in a bid to submit to Allah's will

The first sees women as passive victims of oppressive patriarchal and / or traditions beyond their control. It is a man's world where the social as well as religious system is under the man's control. Women's subordination benefits the patriarch and purdah serves as an instrument that enables and ensures man's control over them. So women either see purdah as oppression or where they support it, it is seen as the internalization of patriarchal norms.

In the second perspective highlighted above, we see some agency where women bargain with patriarchy through various strategies. They can submit to it or subvert it depending upon their positionality within larger social, economic and political structures. Given by Deniz Kandiyoti's (1988) this concept of patriarchal bargains is instructive in elaborating the perspective where women in a patriarchal culture conform to patriarchal demands of their gender as a tactic to get ahead. Also, there are increasingly studies that highlight how purdah may be employed as a strategy to deal with increasing pressures of consumerism where the simple donning of a burqa or an abaya liberates women from the demands of fashion. It also allows them to enter the market in urban spaces where they are being pushed due to poverty, which would have otherwise been impossible due to religio-cultural pressures. Jasmin Mirza (2002) gives an excellent rendition of how women from lower middle-class households in the urban metropolises of Pakistan employ purdah as a strategy to broaden their access to public spaces finding employment in offices, factories and shops.

The last stream led by Saba Mahmood heralds a new movement within feminist theory which challenges the association of women's agency within feminism to liberatory politics. Giving examples from the Egyptian mosque movement she urges us to take note of the 'desires, motivations, commitments and aspirations (Mahmood, 2001: p.225)' of women who pursue goals that seemingly look like submission to patriarchy and not to discount their agency in the pursuance of such goals. Malik (2010) adds to this debate by casting Muslim women as strategizing- agentic subjects who pick and choose from seemingly conflicting traditions to maximize their benefits. She does so through her research on British-Muslim women of Pakistani ethnic origin who draw from modern secular values and norms espoused due to their British citizenship as well as their specific traditional religio-cultural backgrounds to negotiate the oppressions they may face in marriage, divorce and everyday life.

Women's views on veiling and its connections with educational attainment in *Chah Munshi Wala* are thus placed against these myriad academic discussions on veiling. Women in *Chah Munshi Wala* couch their views in multiple perspectives, be it religion, culture or economic realities. As such their views then are not stand alone ideas but based in their specific location within these multiplicities. *Purdah* then for them may be a cultural and religious imperative but it allows increased mobility as well access to education. To view their desires as internalization of patriarchal norms would do injustice to their agency.

Research Objectives and Methodology

This paper is based on qualitative research conducted in a small village *Chah Munshi Wala* in Multan District. The purpose of the research was to investigate women's perceptions of *purdah*, mobility and educational attainment and the relationship between the three. Pakistan scores quite low in female literacy rates. Where the overall literacy stands at 60%, female literacy is 49% as compared to male 71% (Sattar, 2020). One of the reasons advanced for low female literacy are the patriarchal constraints like *purdah* and female segregation. To move beyond these statistics and expert opinions, the researchers looked at the perceptions of women in a small locality. Qualitative data was generated through methods such as observation and indepth interviews from a purposive sample of fifty respondents. Discussion and analysis of data is presented in the following sections.

Women's Perspectives on Purdah

Purdah literally means a curtain or a veil. In practice, purdah is a complex set of rules that stands both for female seclusion and or segregation (Shaheed, 1989; Abid, 2016). Women in *Chah Munshi Wala* perceived it from multiple approaches. They opined about its form, uses and justifications. They also extended its use and necessity for men as discussed below.

What is Purdah for women in Chah Munshi Wala

A respondent was who observed purdah also performed various roles and duties. She worked in the field and as well as a brickyard for meagre earning and contributed though in a lesser degree to the home income. It was also noticed that her mobility was restricted to short distances. A very common view among the villagers was echoed by a respondent:

"Purday ka matlab hai apny ap ko dhanp ke rakhna or sirf zarorat ke liyay hi bahir nikalna (Purdah means to cover the body and leave the house only in case any important obligation needs to be fulfilled)."

In our society we see different meanings attached to purdah and also different variations of purdah exists.

"Purday kay maini hain khud ko namehram ki nazroon se bachana. (The meaning of purdah is to save oneself from the sight of unrelated kin)."

Purdah has also different variations. Even some types of clothes are also related to purdah as one of the respondent expressed:

"Dheela dhala libas pehnana or neqab karna or balon ka chupana purdah hy. (Wearing loose clothing, observing veil and cover the hair is actual purdah)."

Some women gave explanations of purdah beyond clothing.

"Sub se ziyadah ankhon ka purdah zarori hy. The most important purdah is that of the gaze."
"Meray khayal main purdah insan ki nazar mein sharmo haya ka hy. (I think purdah is in the shyness of the human gaze)."

We see purdah is different through the passage of time.

"Purdah aisa hona chahiye ke jis se hath, munh or jisam ki haiyat malum na ho. (Purdah should be always be always like one that does not show any part of the body's shape and proper coverage of hands and face)."

Some women added the heart to the concept of gaze.

"Purdah to nazar ka bh hy aur dil ka bhi. (Purdah is beholden in our sight as well as our heart)."

Some older women were also dismissive of the new trends in parda like the use of an abaya.

"Puranay zamanay main auratain purdah purday kay garz say kartain thin magar aj kal jo wo kalay rang ka abaya pehanti hain wo is liye pehanti hain kay kalay rang kay abbaye main un ka rang gora lagay ga. Aj kal walay abbaye bohat tang hotay hain. Magr phir bhi is purday main bhi sakoon mehsos hota hai. (In past women used to observe purdah with all necessary essentials. But today Purdah concept has totally changed. They wear black color abaya because they think that their fair

complexion becomes shining in contrast to the black abaya and they look much more attractive. Today they use tightly fitted abayas. All these changes are practiced and continue but truth is that they feel comfortable in purdah)."

Functionalist Explanations of Purdah

One of the participants who also wore an abaya confided with me that purdah was not essential part of her lifestyle. She said she used the abaya because it had one good objective:

"Main abaya is liye pahanti hun ken kay mjhey parishani nh hoti kay main kay pahnun gi main kiya kon say kapray pahan kay main college jaon gi, agr main abbay na pahanti hoti tu mera ziyada tar waqt isi cheez main zaya hota kay mjhy kal kea pahanana hai lakin abbaye ki wajah say meri parishani khatam ho gai hai. (I wear the abaya it hides the clothes that I am wearing. I am not worried about the type of clothes to wear especially when I have to attend college. The abaya has saved me from me trouble of wearing any dress wherever I have to go. If I do not wear abaya then most of my time would be wasted in thinking which dress to wear tomorrow. But abaya lessened my tension)."

Purdah gives us all types of freedom. Purdah liberates us, but sometimes culture binds the women because we know different customs are attached to purdah. Now a day women wear abaya or veil and head covering scarf as a sembol of liberation and mobility. We can verbally express present form of purdah as empowerment tool to access the public sphere and fight for their rights. In the previous and past times purdah gave freedom to women.

"Purdah mn rah kar bohat kuch kiya ja sakta hy. Puranay zamanain main Ummaht ul momineen nain purday main rah kar mukhtalif jangon main hisa liya zakhmiyon ko pani pilaya. Purdah kisi bhi kam main rukawat nh hy."

In purdah we do everything. In past ummahat- ul- momineen observed purdah and took part in the pitched battles and carried water to the injured. Purdah did not restrict them to carry out this dangerous duty and they knew that they could lose their lives but continues with their mission. Purdah does not create any difficulty, one of my respondents remarked:

"Purdah to khain bh nhin rukawat bnta ap purdah kar ke jahan marzi jao."

Purdah does not create any restriction in the free movement of women. I think purdah does not create any hurdles in its observance. But actually purdah is freedom, not restriction. Another respondent tells me:

"Purdah kisi tarha bh nh rukawat bnta larkiyon kay taleem hasil karny main."

Purdah does not impede toward girl's education. Purdah is important for very women. Purdah makes women a confident personality.

"Purdah aurat ko dabata to nh hai wo us ki shaksiat ujar karta hai batata hai kay kaya us ka taluq kis gharany say hai. Purdah to shaksiat ki pehchan hai."

Purdah does not oppress the women rather it enlightens their personality. Through Purdah we also know to which family a woman belongs to. Purdah is the identity of the person.

Religious Explanations of Purdah

Most women explained Purdah in religious terms saying that as they live in a Muslim society Purdah is an obligation. Though not citing any verse particular verse from the Holy Quran, most women gave the impression that covering up was a religious imperative.

“Aurat ke lagwy maini chupani ki cheeze hain aur purdah Allah talah ki taraf se auraton ke lye farz kea gaya hy. (The dictionary meaning of women is an object that needs to be hidden and that is why Allah has used the word ‘woman’ for them).”

“Aurat chupanian ki cheez hai isis liye purday kay zariye hum aurat ko chupattay hain (The woman is a hidden object so through purdah we hide the woman).”

“Purdah aurat ke leya zarori hy or isey karna bh chahiye. (Purdah is compulsory for women and she must observe it).

When asked why is purdah compulsory for women?

“Purdah auarat kay liye bana hai hazrat umer nain kisi ko auraton kay baray main bat kartay suna to unhon nain apni kwaish ka izhar kea or allah kay fazal say usi waqt purday ka hukam nazil huwa to auratain jahan thin wahin baith gain or jab tak gaharon say chadarain nah a gain wo wahin bathi rah gain itna bara hukam aurat kay liye diya Allah nain. (Purdah is made for women. Hazrat Umar (RA) heard someone talking about women and he wished purdah for women from Allah and then Allah Talah blessed the females with purdah and also asked to follow it strictly. When women heard about purdah they sat down wherever they were and did not rise and leave until their mehrams did not fetch chaddars from their homes. Allah gave such a important decree to women).”

Some women acknowledged that culture in addition to religion influenced purdah observance.

“Hamara culture hamain is baray main biata hy ke purdah aurat ke liyay hy or doosri baat yh hy ke hm logon ka taluq musalman gharaon se hy or hamara mahol bh hmain yahi biata hy. (Our culture recognizes that purdah is for the women and the other thing is that we belong to Muslim families and our environment teaches us the same thing).”

Observing purdah is also seen as a way to uphold women’s honor in the culture of their village.

“Purday main aurat ki izzat hy na ke zilat. Women has her respect not disrespect in purdah)”.

Women were also aware of the dynamics of how covering up may be associated with rural communities seen as inferior which is exemplified by the use of the term “*paindoo*” which literally means belonging to a *pind* (village) but has a derogatory connotation as if those belonging to a village are backward and inferior. To overcome this they associate Purdah to honor and respect saying that Allah ordered women to cover up because he wanted to bestow respect on them.

“Agr purday mein aj kal ke log larki ko dekhty han to yhi sochtay hain ke yh larki an parh ho paindoo ho giisey bolny ka dhang nh ho ga or jase purday ke baray man log kahtay hain ke is ki waja se mushkil hoti hy to asa kuch nh hy balkay purday main to aurat ki izat hy or is main apnay ap ko pur sakoon mehsos kartay hain khud ko. Today, if someone sees women in purdah than they think she is uneducated or a villager and she doesn’t know the way of talking and a few people say purdah creates problems, but purdah is not problematic for women rather women’s honor is associated to purdah. She feels comfortable in it).”

Transformations in Purdah Observance

Women in Chah Mundhi Wala generally opined that over years both the form and extent of purdah observance has changed.

“Purany zamany ke purday main or aj kal ke purday main boht farq hy pehly dosri tarha tha ab dosari tarha hy phly aurtain ghr main rahti hotin thin magar aj kal auratain neqaib kar ke bahir nikal rahi hn. (We see a huge difference in the past and present purdah. In the past purdah existed in a different context and today purdah is prevalent in a different manner. In the past women used to live in their houses and seldom to go out, but today they are free to move around in veil and go out of their homes more often than the women in the past used to).”

In this comparison between the past and the present, women believed that the younger generation was better adept at purdah observance.

“Pehly bhi auratain purdah karti hoti thin magr wo apny ap ko dhanpany ka to sochati thin mgr wo is ke tareeq ko is ke mtlb ko nh samjh patin thin ab jo ke modernization ka doar hy yahan larkiyan parhi likhi hain to inhain sahi maino main pta hy kea purdah kasay kiya jye achy se. In the past women did observe purdah and thought to cover their body, but she did not know the actual meaning of purdah and did not understand its fundamental reason behind it. With modernization having gained strength in this modern world and women’s inclination toward accepting new trends in fashion, the women are quite aware of the ways in which Purdah has to be observed).”

Purdah for Men

Many women were adamant that purdah was as necessary for men as for women. They would use religious justifications for insistence on purdah observance by men. A common observation was that, “we recite the Holy Quran we come to know purdah is designed for both male and female as mentioned in the Quranic Ayat translation in the introduction. Through this Quranic decree we know purdah is made for both genders. But the society where we live asks women only to observe purdah and the males are never inquired about such important task by the society. That’s why other societies assume that women are oppressed by purdah due to Islamic teachings”.

One respondent was quite vehement in her view.

“Purdah aurat kay sath sath mard pey bhi farz kea gaya hy. Wo alag bat hy kay mard is cheez ko zarori nh samjhtay. (Purdah is not only for women, it is obligatory for men also. On the other hand, it is a different thing that males do not consider it as an obligation).”

Similar view expressed by another respondent.

“Wase purdah karna to mardon ko bhi chahiye ke purdah karain magr yahain py bat a jati hy kay hum log mardon ki society main rahtay hain or yahan pay sirf unhon ki hi chalati hy. (As a matter of fact, Purdah should be observed by the male members too, but at this point we are living in a men’s society where they get to control).”

Interestingly some women thought that purdah causes increased harassment of women as it creates curiosity among people who like to see more of the women who observe purdah. One of the respondents had this to tell:

“Purdah logon kay liye attraction pada karta hai ken kay log us bandi ko jis nain purdah kiya huwa hai usay ziyada ghoratain hain na kay us ko jis nian duppatta liya ho ya na liya ho. (Purdah creates more fascination for the people and their curious eyes follow women when covered, more intensely. Individuals give a deep gaze to the females who use the veil and abaya and stare less those who use the shawl or dupatta only).”

For this reason, she felt that it was more important to impose the religious obligation of purdah on men.

We can see from the above responses how women differed in their perceptions of *purdah*, both in form and intent associating it variously to clothing, gaze or even the intention of the heart. This in itself is quite instructive as to open up the meaning, practice as well as the institution of *purdah*. If it is a system of rules as suggested in the beginning of this section, then these women show agency in engaging with this system and reclaiming some of the normative explanations. We have seen how *purdah* is seen as an oppressive instrument. Where women willingly adopt it, reductive analysis of internalization of patriarchal norms is advanced by scholars (Jeffery 1971). The above views of respondents challenge some of this reductive analysis that does not place women within their specific context.

Women's Views on Mobility

Mobility is the physical ability to move around outside the house and one from one state to another. In this case, we are talking about mobility in the public sphere, which constitutes all those activities which do not take place in the domestic circles. Respondents spoke about the barriers to their mobility and how the use of *purdah* eased some of these restrictions. They also discussed how perceptions of mobility had changed over the years.

Restrictions on Mobility

Women face many barriers in mobility. It was observed in the field that women needed permission from men or older women to go out. If they went out of their homes even for work, they faced many problems. Most of the time these problems were created by their own relatives or even neighbors. Anita Wiess (2010) also speaks of how women's mobility is restricted by spatial constraints in inner city Lahore where the fear of neighbors' gossiping keeps women within four walls of the house despite economic hardships and the push to find employment. As a result they take up home based work which is not only invisible but also exploitative.

Women in Chah Munshi Wala also pointed towards this 'push' into the public space.

"Aurat ghar se bahir majboori main nikalti hy. (Women go out of the house due to compulsions only)."

Women feel that they are not understood that they are not going out of their houses for enjoyment but for work.

Many women also pointed out that there are no restrictions on women's mobility in Islam. They gave examples from Muslim history saying that women participated in battles tending to the wounded. But for them, Islam asks the women not to leave homes without reason. It's the society and its current culture they blamed for putting restrictions on women's mobility.

"Aurat har waqt bahir nahin nikal sakti. Hamara mashara is cheeze ko acha nh samja jata aur na hi mashara ijazat deta hy. (Women does not stay out of their homes all the time. Our society does not deem good to it and nor allows the women that much of independence)."

Some refereed to the sexual division of labour where men belong to the [public space and women to the private but still gave some concession to women to go out.

"Marad bana hi bahir ki duniyan ke liye hy aurat waqt py jati hy or waqt py ati hy. (Men in any case have to spend more time out of their homes but women have time restriction as they have to go out in time and return in time)."

Another respondent says the same thing, but in a different way when he tells us that we Women face many hurdles when she takes a decision to go out of the house. Even some women do not feel comfortable when

she goes out of the house without male member. She prefers to be out of the house with any male member or some other family member.

“Aurat kisi bh waqt bahir nh nikal sakti raatmain to bilkul bh nh aur din main bh kisi ko bahir lye ke nikal sakti hy chahye w oak choota bacha h ken na ho ken ke wo bacha us ke lye sahara hota hy us ke sath ony se usay tasali hoti hy. (Women did not go out the house at any time, especially in the night. Even in the day time if she plans to out of home visit she prefers to have company of someone. So it does not matter if it's a small boy even. The company of small boy is a complete support for her and when she is with him she feels secure and safe and comfortable).”

Women go out of the house only in case of some obligation. If she goes out of the house too often, then people start gossiping about her and that creates very tense situation for her.

“Aurat sirf majbori ke tahat hi ghr se bahir jati hy agar wo aik ghanty ke lye bhi bahir chali jye to charcha ho jata hy. Raat ke waqt to wo nikal hi nh sakti na. Woman leaves her house only because she is helpless. If she has to go out for one hour even, the news spreads like fire. It is impossible for her to go out at night).”

One of the respondents said that women go to the public places but I think it is problematic for her because presence of different men in the public sphere can cause serious issues as none of these are her *mehram*.

“Bahir jany main sirf ak yahi masala hy keh ap par ghair mehram ki nighah parti hy. (The sole problem in mobility is that women are open to the gaze of men who are not mehram).”

Purdah and Mobility

So we see from the above views of respondents that for them women's mobility has very close and essential relation to purdah. For them purdah and mobility have to be seen jointly and not separately. It solves the problems of neighbors gossiping, the men's gaze on women and the issue of meeting *na-mehrams*. So they created justifications for women's movement in public space through religious rhetoric.

“Islam kahta hy ke purdah main bahir jao or apny mard ki ijazat se jao. Islam asks the women to go out but in purdah and with the permission of her man).”

“Agr larkiyan parrhnain kay liye ya phir nokari kay liye purdahy main rahain to wo zyada behtar hai. Agr wo fashion kar kay bahir nikalay gi to islam is cheez ki ijazat nahin data. (If girls go out of the house for jobs and education in purdah then it's too good for them. But if she goes out only for fashion then it's not good and Islam also does not allow it).”

Changes in Mobility of Women

For many, the meaning of mobility has changed over time. In the past women's mobility was restricted to fewer places outside the home by due to security concern and because of social norms. Now, women mobility has undergone so much change.

“Phlay zamana jahaliyat tha jo aurat py sakhti ki jati thi magar aj kal auratain mardon ki nisbat zyada kam kar rahi hain. (In early times we had an uninformed society where women had no say in anything and she was strictly monitored, but today we see women working harder than most men).”

If women are performing their jobs, then fewer people perceive and relate it negatively. They admit if she is doing some job and earning some money, she must feel proud and important member of the house. But they know if women have work they must be allowed mobility.

"Aj kal auratain apni zyada chalati hn agr mard koi cheeze ly kar aye to wo pasand nh kartin tu phr mard unhain kahty hn ke khud jao or lay ao (Today, women do what they want according to their own will. If male buys something for her she doesn't like it. Then male member asks her go and buy it herself)."

For many economic imperatives have brought about a change in mobility.

"Larkiyan aur mard ikathay kam kar rahy hn aj kal ken ke aj kal larkiyon ki parhai larkoan se bh zyada zarori ho gai hy (Today, both male and female work together because women education is more compulsory rather than male members)."

"Aj kal itni mahangai ho gai hy ke aurat ko mard ke saath shana bashana chalna par raha hy (Today the cost of living has ske rocketed and that is why it has become very important that women work alongside men)."

"Aj kal mahngai bohat zyada ho gai hy yahi waja hy ke dono mil kar kam karty hn to ghar chalta hy. (Today the graph of cost of living is going up and because of this both are working together with the aim to run the home smoothly)."

"Aurat apnay ghar walon ki zaroriyat pori karny ke liye ghr se bahir nikal rahi hy (Women go out of the house to fulfill the needs of their family members)."

The above discussion points out the traditional restriction on women's mobility. Some of these restrictive traditions have undergone transformation due to economic pressures. Others have eased based on increased education which itself have been made possible due to the veiling which allows women to go in public spaces.

Women's Views on Education

Discussions of purdah and mobility largely centered on religious rhetoric where the practice was seen as an ideology. Though discourse on education saw the same trajectory, it is here that we saw women's discontent with the gap in what is the ideal and what is practice. For them education is compulsory for both sexes in Islam. Islam gives utmost importance to education. Women saw Islam as an enlightened religion that gives them the freedom to make choices including in education. They felt that the backward thinking of the society that placed barriers on women's learning clearly alluding to practices which are different from the ideal.

"Islam nain to dono larkay larkiyon ko yh haq diya hy ke wo dono taleem hasil kar sakain. (Islam gives equal rights to both girls and boys to get education)."

Importance of Education

For them Islam gives more importance to education than any other discipline because when education allows a person to differentiate between good and bad and make reasonable and wise choices. But they stressed the importance of both religious as well as secular education.

"Yeh sahi nh hai kay hum log apni sari tawajhu dunyavi taleem pay dain hamain deni taleem bhi hasil karni chahiye ken danyavi taleem to yahin rah jaye gi magar humain qabar main bhi jana hai wahan deni taleem hi kam aye gi. (It is not good we give full concentration on temporal education. We have also got religious education because temporal education will be staying here and I have gone to grave and in that religious education help us)."

Most made no distinction between educating a girl or a boy. They considered education compulsory for both genders. Most opined that there was a distinction between girl education and boy's education in the past, but with the passage of time they have seen gender discrimination lessen.

"Larki parh ke mahol to thek karti hy. beta to aik nasal ko sanwarta hy lakin beti sat nasalon ko sanwarti hy isi liye beti ki parhai zarori hy. After getting education girl make a better environment. The son makes one generation ameliorated, but daughter makes seven generations ameliorated that's why girl education is compulsory)".

They considered education as an important part of contemporary life. Education gave them sense to make better decisions and work for the betterment of the society.

"Taleem hasel karnay se insan ko shaoor ata hy. (Through education, humans gain consciousness)."

Education teaches us to make clear distinction between what is good and what is bad for us. It teaches us expand our knowledge and assimilate all good things about life. If we are educated then we know better about our culture and environment.

"Parhai likhi larki ko bahir ke mahol ke bary main achy se pta chal jata hy. (Educated girl know better about the external environment)."

Some also pointed out that if girls lag behind men in education it has more to do with limited resources than demands of purdah. Purdah for them was not a barrier to education.

"Purdah kisi tarha bh rukawat nh bnta larkiyan ke taleem hasil karnain main. (Anyway purdah does not create any restriction in getting education for girls)."

Different perceptions of education have existed in Chah Munshi Wala. Few people thought through getting the education one gains knowledgeable information which is helpful in general. Others linked it to better employment opportunities. Some saw it as a means of the betterment of the family. Following are some of the views:

"Taleem insan ko sahoor dati hy us aqal dati hy. (Education gives human sense and wisdom)."

"Agr ghr pay koi musibat a jye to parhay likhy nkari kar ke apna guzara kar laty hain. (If we face financial problem at home, then educated persons do the job for the day to day running of home)."

"Taleem se insan ko samjh a jati hy use pyar ikhlaq or unchay or neechay ke baray main pta lag jata hy. (Education gives wisdom, promotes love and good manners and tells us of the highs and lows of life)."

"Taleem ki missal asi hai jasay andharay main roshani (Example of education is like this light in the darkness)."

In general, they were very supportive of girls' education but were wary of the outside environment. For them their society gave permission to girls to get education, but there are problems which girls have to counter and these are related to the environment of the community and one these are the eve teasers assembled outside the girls education institutes who make life difficult for the girls mobility. So it's very problematic for girls and also her parents, they are so worried about that difficult situation so some time because of it girls leave their studies. In short girls faces a few problems because of the so called cultural malpractices.

“Hamara mashara ijazat to data hai larki ko kay wo taleem hasil karay magar aj kal hum log jis masharay main rah rahy hain tu us main akeli larki ka bahir jana mumkin nahin hai. Isi liye agar larki kahin parhanain ja rahi hai to us ko chor kar or lay kar anay wala bhi ko hona chahiye. Or agar wo apnay waldain kay sath jaye tu thk hai.

Our society gives permission to girls for education but today the society that we are living in does not allow girls to move easily in public sphere. That’s why if some girls go out for education purpose then parents have to bear responsibility to see them off and ensure their pick up also. If she accompanies parents then its safe).”

Despite these apprehensions, respondents kept stressing the benefits of education for girls. Interesting some women also wanted the researcher to take note of the contributions girls who had not had the opportunity to get an education.

“Parahi or un parh dono shareholder hain mulk ki taraqi agar parhi likhi mulk kay Business ko dekh rahi hain to unparh bhi khaiton main kam kar rahi hain karhain or janwar bhi pal rahi hain main agar sub raniyain ban jain gin to yahin phir bandi kn banay gai. (Educated and uneducated both are shareholder and stakeholders in the development of the country. If educated women participate in business enterprises, then uneducated women can work in the field, do embroidery work, conduct soap making or do cattle breeding she too can help the family as well as the economy. If all the women become successful entrepreneurs or dominant leaders then who will be willing to take the lesser paid jobs like becoming house maids).”

In all the verdict was in favor of girls education. They saw it as a matter of pride for the parents and the girls when they excel in studies win laurels for themselves and the family. They A respondent also added that in addition to pride for the family, educated girls had better marriage prospects.

“Agr larki parhi likhi hai to wo nkahray karay gi apna kamaye gi nokari karay gi. parhi likhi hai isi wajah say us kay rishta jaldi or achi jaga pay ho jaye ga un kay bahir say rishat atay hain. Wo bohat fakhar say uthi bathti hain. (If girls are educated then she would have occasional tantrums. Since she has done the job she is ready to enter the job market and earn. If the girl is educated, there are more chances that she would start receiving offer of marriage and would tie the matrimonial knot more quickly than the one who is uneducated. They move proudly with education tag around them and this gives recognition).”

Education and Mobility

Education and mobility have a very close relationship because without mobility education is not possible. In whatever scenario mobility plays the most vital role in making education feasible to the masses. The preceding section highlights education being obligatory for respondents in Chah Munshi Wala. But they also stressed on one of the basic conditions of education – leaving homes and traveling to other places to get education. So for them education required mobility.

“Aj kal larkiyon parhai kay liye or job kay liye ghar sa bahir nikal rahi hain. (Today girls go out of their homes for studies and jobs too and this due to the education). This created a dilemma in there society where culture and society did not allow women to leave the homes. Some felt that purdah should not be compromised for education.

“Taleem zaror haseel karni chahiye lkn agr wo purday main rukawat ban rahi ho to pihr ruk jana cahiya. (Getting education is obligatory for all of us. But if education creates any hurdle in purdah then we force our girls to give up education).”

Others opined that education was a must and cultural imperatives can be compromised for this higher value skill.

“Aurat ko parhai ke lye agr rat ko bh ghr se bahir nikalna paray to ussay bahir nikalna chahiye warna pechay rah jaye gi.(If a woman has to go out of the homes in evening for education purpose then she should go otherwise she will be left behind).”

This is where the utility of purdah comes in. It allows the freedom to step out, and interact even with unrelated men without fear of social repercussions as pointed out in preceding sections on mobility. In a nutshell, respondents placed a higher value on education both for religious as well as economic reasons. The religious rhetoric seemed to facilitate in advancing and easing educational attainment. Hence the accompanied emphasis on *purdah*. The same religious explanations given for adoption of purdah were used in support of women's education by respondents in *Chah Munshi Wala* much.

This is how these women strategize and negotiate with patriarchal constraints to achieve a resource that will enable them to get ahead in life like education. Humeira Iqtidar (2011) highlights how some women activists in Jama'at-ud-Da'wa used their heightened religiosity and belief to create spaces for them in terms of employment, mobility and even more choice in marital decisions. Respondents in this study seemed no different. Their use of religious rhetoric in favour of *purdah* should not be viewed as internalization of patriarchal norms that contribute to the stability of this system (Jeffery 1979), but as bargains (Kandiyoti 1988) creating more opportunities for them.

Conclusion

The women in *Chah Munshi Wala* link *purdah* to increased mobility and in turn access to education. They use both cultural as well as religious rhetoric to justify the observance of *purdah*. The same rhetoric is then used to exercise mobility and then later on opening up venues of education and employment for women. Instead of seeing purdah as a barrier or obstacle, these women see it in a more facilitating light highlighting the functionalist perspective. Their varied interpretations of what purdah is, how should it be observed both by men and women, its links with education that requires mobility allows us to see the multiplicity of perspectives based on the location and position of these women within their social setup.

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