EDUCATION AND WOMEN:
NON-FORMAL EDUCATION AMONG LOWER SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS WOMEN IN PAKISTAN IN THEIR VOICE

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The goal of the study was to examine the facilitative and obstructive factors in accessibility of education, for lower socioeconomic status women and the educational needs of these women. This study followed the qualitative interpretive approach, using semi-structured interviews and field notes. To analyze the coded data Seeberg’s (2011) empowerment capabilities approach was used.

The participants were women, fifteen years of age and above, attending literacy training in a rural community in Punjab, Pakistan. The study was helpful in discovering some of the factors that can support women to complete their basic education. However, little evidence was found that showed that some of the socio-cultural obstructions to women’s enrollment were affected or ameliorated. The facilitators that were deduced were: the importance of a ‘mobilizer’ person, a sense of well-being while in an educational setting, flexibility in class timing, proximity to the literacy center, need for helping children with school work, acquiring confidence and socializing. The obstructive factors were: women’s traditional roles, as wives and mothers, son-preference, higher opportunity cost of girls’ education, women’s internalization of lesser status, segregation, ‘purity’ before marriage and poverty. What women wanted was education with the potential of leading to a job.
Literacy classes had given the women enough confidence to leave chores unfinished and face criticism from families and community to come to the literacy center. From this it was deduced that continuation of education accompanied by social action can make an impact on women’s empowerment.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

The ability to read and write in an increasingly technological society is a fundamental need. For those groups that find that they are missing out on the benefits of both modernization and democratization, particularly rural populations, ethnic minorities, and women, literacy constitutes an essential tool in their efforts to gain legal and socioeconomic rights. Except for a few countries, women have lower levels of literacy than men. In developing countries, this disparity is even greater. In spite of the evidence for the phenomena that more education for women results in fewer children per family, less infant mortality, marriage at a late age, healthier, better-reared and educated children, and a reduction in transgenerational poverty; these high returns to female education have attracted insufficient public and private investment in women’s schooling; particularly in those countries where women’s literacy rate is significantly lower than men.

This chapter includes three sections. The first section frames the situation of women’s education as it exists in Pakistan today, the policies proclaimed by the government, and the barriers that inhibit women’s literacy programs. The second section describes the purpose of the study which is to investigate nonformal education (NFE) among lower socioeconomic status (SES) women in Pakistan - the constraints and the supports. The third section delineates personal interest that led me to examine the sociocultural influences that impact the women who decide to attend the adult literacy projects.
Problem Statement

Illiteracy is a manifestation of the unequal distribution of power and resources in society and the historical cultural ideologies that undergird it. It is disproportionately found among urban and rural poor, particularly among women in rural areas and in marginal urban sectors. Human development is possible only by improving women’s status, especially their educational status. There is compelling evidence that the social and economic rates of return from schooling are quite high and on the whole higher for women than for men (Abu-Ghaida & Klasen, 2004; Seeberg & Ross, 2007). It is argued that female education increases women’s productivity and contributes to higher economic returns. Furthermore, women’s education accrues long-term intergenerational benefits (King & Hill, 1991; Mak, 1996). Educating women reduces fertility, maternal mortality, and infant mortality rates (Caldwell, 1979; Cochrane, 1979; Mak, 1996). Educated mothers also produce better educated children. Econometric studies have shown that even a small amount of education leads to significant economic growth (Abu-Ghaida & Klasen, 2004; Mak, 1996) In other words, women’s education plays a very crucial role in the development of a country (Cream, 2005). Comparing fathers’ and mothers’ education effects shows that educated mothers are more likely than fathers to invest their earnings in the healthcare, food, and education of their children. Increases in child survival rates are twenty percent higher if the mother is educated than the father (Save the Children, 2005). Yet in Pakistan, girls do not receive the same quality and level of education as do boys. Why does this disparity still persist, in spite of the government’s good intentions that they proclaim at every Five Year Development Plan?
Stromquist (1990) contends that the belief that women are inferior to men could not persist, independent of some reason that makes this belief a good choice. If this belief were simply anchored in a non-material cultural tradition we would expect to see a great deal of variability in the status of women across societies and across time, presumably discrimination criteria would depend on fads and thus be unstable. Yet we find a remarkable consistency in the identification of women as inferior. If we compare the range of career, occupation, and life options open to women and men as groups, in the final analysis men would emerge as the privileged group. Women do receive lower salaries in the public world and they can fulfill more duties at home; precisely, because they are less competitive in the outside world. The ideology of women’s inferiority develops dynamics of its own, and becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy as women are also assigned inferior economic roles.

To understand state-led development in Pakistan, it is important to look at the origins of macro planning, anti-poverty projects, and how issues affecting women are addressed within them. A typical plan involves a definition of objectives, followed by resource allocation and mobilization across sectors. A plan often has hard and soft sections, the former being the sectors considered to be the core productive sectors of the economy, while the latter often include the social development sectors, special areas and group programs; the programs with so-called social objectives, and poverty alleviation. The typical poverty alleviation program falls within the soft section of the plan. It suffers from low fiscal allowance to begin with, and is the first to receive any of the budget cuts,
as well as from the consequent attitudes of planners who come to view such programs as unproductive (Heyzer & Sen, 1994).

Women have entered these programs in two ways: one, as the minor sector – a section, a bureau, a department within a ministry – with a small share in resources and two, as a special group in poverty programs. While this is without doubt, an important beginning, the bulk of the resources are allocated to other productive ventures, with women quite low on the priority list of public policy makers (Heyzer & Sen, 1994; Moser & Peake, 1994).

The following excerpt from Education for All (EFA) Report (2000) from Pakistan will illustrate what Heyzer and Sen (1994); Moser and Peake (1994) contend about funds being allocated away from the soft sector - of which literacy is certainly a part - when there is a squeeze on funds.

Prime Minister’s Literacy Commission in 1995 formulated a project titled "Establishment of 10,000 Non-formal Basic Education Schools" with the total cost of Rs.1263.375 million. The project is to be implemented within the period of five years.

The project is based on the idea of home-schooling, to be run through Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs). The project was started in April, 1996. The financial allocation for the year 1996-97 was Rs.241.352 million but the allocated amount was later reduced to Rs.100 million. Resultantly, the project received a major setback. The teachers
could not get salaries in time nor did the students receive the books and learning materials. (sec. 6.4)

In Pakistan’s First Five Year Plan education seemed to figure as a social service, and hence a part of the soft sector, As such, the infrastructure (i.e., water and power, and transport and communication) and industry were given the highest priority.

The major educational issues that were outlined in the First Plan were:

- The education system should be inspired by Islamic ideology.
- Free and compulsory education should be introduced for a period of five years.
- Technical education should be reorganized to build the country’s future economic life. (Hoodbhoy, 1998, p. 36; Qureshi & Rarieya, 2007, p. 4)

As is quite clear, there is no mention of a program that deals with women’s literacy needs, exclusively.

It was not until the Sixth Plan (1983-1988) that the government actually undertook any major action to enhance the condition of women’s education. The Sixth Plan officially endorses integration of women into national development. To raise women’s status, it recommended an increase in health facilities, more positions in government, and additional educational and vocational training to increase employment opportunities for women. The Sixth Plan set a target of increasing female participation in the primary schools from 32 percent to 60 percent and the female literacy rate from 13.7 percent to 47 percent (Hathaway, 2005, p. 58; Mak, 1996, p. 193; Qureshi & Rerieya, 2007, p. 6).
The Seventh Plan (1988-1993) again reiterated the importance of uplifting women’s position and of integrating women into national development process. The plan recognizes gender gap in education. Girls’ enrollment in primary schools was targeted to increase from 45 percent to 70 percent. The literacy was planned to rise to 40 percent by 1992-93 and to 80 percent by the end of the century. However, by 1996, the time when Mak (1996) published her book, no results were available to her for any of the targeted goals (Hathaway, 2005, p. 65; Mak, 1996, p. 194; Qureshi & Rarieya, 2007, p. 7).

Despite the repeated proclamations of the importance of education in human resource development, very little has been done to improve it. Roughly one-half of the adult males and three-quarters of the adult females are considered illiterate. The female illiteracy rate is 65 percent higher than that of the world’s low-income countries. Girls tend to be under-represented in schools. At the primary level, girls account for 31 percent of the overall enrollment (EFA, 2011). The analysis of the Plans shows that the actual expenditure was far less than planned allocation. No wonder women’s education remained a neglected area within this low-priority sector, since females are accommodated only after males (Hathaway, 2005, p. 65; Hoodbhoy, 1998, p. 5; Mak, 1996. p. 195).

Factors which contribute to the low female attendance rate include the greater opportunity costs of educating girls (girls are considered more useful than boys in the home); concerns over safety en route to school; traditions of female seclusion; shortage of female teachers; and lack of appropriate sanitary facilities within the school premises,
as well as patriarchal beliefs of female intellectual weakness (Hoodbhoy, 1998; Mak, 1996).

EFA Report (2000) on Pakistan also delineates the causes of low enrollment of girls in schools. They are:

i. Poverty, illiteracy and conservatism of the parents generating negative attitudes against the education of girls.

ii. Low base of female education at the time of independence and persistent obsession of parents, planners and community leaders that first available educational facility must be reserved for boys and girls be treated as a second preference as compared to boys.

iii. Demand for separate girls’ schools and lack of adequate financial support.

iv. Non-availability of qualified and experienced female school teachers and neglect of basic physical facilities for female schools.

v. Lack of incentives for girls to attend schools and teachers to take up teaching duties with commitment and devotion.

vi. Irrelevant curricula and ineffective teaching methodology for multigrade teaching in schools where two teachers teach five classes in one or two rooms.

vii. Inhibiting role of uneducated mothers and severe attitudinal barriers to girls’ education in the rural and tribal areas.

viii. Non-existence of a girls’ primary school or availability of a school at an inaccessible distance.
ix. Heavy population growth-rate and burden of household work in large families on the female children.

x. Absence of essential facilities like drinking water, mats for squatting or benches for sitting, urinals and space for playing, etc. in existing girls’ schools.

xi. Apathy of the community and ineffective supervisory system.

xii. Poor impact of non-governmental organizations on the motivation of parents and girls. (sec. 6.2)

The revised version of the 2000 EFA report, which was tabulated in 2002 states the goals for primary education as:

Planning For Universal Primary Education (UPE):

Goals:

i. Ensuring that by 2015 all children with special emphasis on girls and children in difficult circumstances have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality;

ii. Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls’ full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality; . . . . (p. 20)

As can be seen from the excerpts above, the plans for enrollment and completion of primary schools for both boys and girls are extensive and enthusiastic. Furthermore, the government is also completely cognizant of the barriers to female education, but the
fact of the matter is that the government has not been able to achieve the goals that it had set for itself in the 1990s decade. To presume that the government will achieve 100 percent enrollment in primary schools by 2015, seems to be a rather uphill battle, especially where girls’ enrollment is concerned, if you take into consideration the fact that it had been considerably lower than the proposed target, at the termination of every Five Year Plan.

An analysis of key policy recommendations, over the past forty plus years, shows that the intention to achieve gender parity in primary education has been a continuing policy aim and a number of strategies have been recommended in successive policy documents. However, until 1992, education for girls had been promoted mainly for its value to the enhancement of women’s productive functions (as homemakers, mothers, nurses, doctors, teachers and caretakers of future generations) within the family and the nation. The 1992 policy recognized education up to the primary level as a human right, most likely as a consequence of the international declaration at EFA, Jomtien (1990) (Qureshi & Rarieya, 2007). Nevertheless, this change in policy stance has had little implications for action on the ground.

Pakistan’s national leaders have not made primary education a top priority. Presidents and prime ministers have all come out with cogent rhetoric about the need for better education, but they rarely provided the leadership and budgets necessary to improve schools across the country. Unlike Indonesia, where President Suharto proposed the reform of primary education and held government officials responsible for carrying it out, Pakistan has long been content to issue far-reaching plans followed by little action.
The 2000 and 2002 EFA reports are an excellent example of this kind of bureaucratic leadership which relies on a lot of rhetoric and very little actual execution of the plans (Warwick & Reimers, 1995).

Pakistan has one of Asia’s worst systems of government-sponsored education. In 2008 (the latest statistics available), Pakistan’s overall literacy rate was 54 percent and its literacy rate for women 45 percent. Primary schools enrolled about a third of eligible students, and of those students only 58 percent completed grade five. These figures contrast sharply with China and Indonesia, where total literacy rates in 2008 were over 90 percent and enrollment of female primary-school students reached 100 percent in China and 80 percent in Indonesia (EFA Report, 2011).

Pakistan’s five-year plans show that the government has been aware of the costs of low literacy enrollment, but it has provided neither the leadership nor the resources to deal with these issues. Authors have given different explanations for Pakistan’s poor performance in education. Some claim that this situation results from the low value Pakistanis put on education, particularly in rural areas, and economic conditions that provide little incentive for educating children and cultural bias against the education of women. Warwick and Reimers (1995) contend that the experience of many countries, including Indonesia in the 1970s and Bangladesh in the 1990s, supports a more optimistic view of government initiatives. This experience and that of other Asian countries, Hathaway (2005); Warwick and Reimers (1995) maintain shows that governments can take a lead in bringing about a change, in the sociocultural biases as well as providing
economic incentives to encourage the acquisition of education, especially for girls and women.

If every government in Pakistan had made a strong commitment to primary education and provided the resources necessary for schools to be built and teachers to be hired, its current record would be far better than the figures reported earlier. When governments truly want to improve the literacy and educational opportunities of their citizens they can take the lead in overcoming adverse conditions; rather than waiting for changes in those conditions to push them into action (Hathaway, 2005; Warwick & Reimers, 1995).

**Supports and Constraints for Women’s Education**

Some strategies which have been successful in motivating parents to send their girls to school have included: (a) Sustained interaction with both men and women in the community and motivating community leadership to set an example by sending their own daughters to schools. (b) Introduction of policies to ensure continued participation of girls in schools, provision of teacher training for female teachers and on-going monitoring and support, and (c) Incentives, such as matching grants, per child subsidy etc., to manage community schools (Afshar, 1998, 2000; Aksornkol, 1997; Qureshi & Rarieya, 2007).

Beyond the above outlined state inaction in providing services and education, two factors at the participant level are cited as the major impediments for female education in Pakistan: sociocultural attitudes and poverty. The existence of long-standing tradition of social segregation of women, early marriage, the exclusion of women from the organized
labor force, the subordination of women to male members of the family, and women’s unequal status in society, in general, are constraints on female emancipation and education. In culturally restrictive environments, such as that of Pakistan, adolescent girls may be viewed as morally suspect if they continue going to school. The importance of preserving a girl’s purity up to marriage leads to widespread withdrawal of girls from school at puberty, particularly if they are attending coeducational schools. For example, parental reluctance to send daughters to school without proper attire increases the cost of girls’ schooling. Education is also perceived as corrupting the traditional attitudes of females, such as changing women into self-centered beings, defiant of parental authority, and uninterested in household chores. Thus, education for girls becomes socially as well as economically costly (Mak, 1996; Qureshi & Rarieya 2007).

In general, girls and women have a low status in the family, community and society, relative to boys and men. This disparity is reflected in poor access to all kinds of resources: education, health care, economic, legal, and political. Islam, the dominant religion in Pakistan, gives women the right to inheritance but they are rarely allowed to claim their share. Girls are socialized to serve men in the family and to be obedient to them. Their mobility is restricted and dependent on the decision of the men and elders in the family. Women represent family honor and often become victims of family/tribal feuds and rivalries (Qureshi & Rarieya, 2007).

Women are more deprived in areas with large landholdings and feudal and tribal influence. For example, the status of education measured in terms of enrollment and literacy rate shows that in northern Punjab districts, women have a higher educational
status than districts in southern Punjab which has larger and agriculturally richer landholdings and consequently a much stronger feudal stronghold (Qureshi & Rarieya, 2007).

The feudal culture and the absence of democracy (and democratic attitudes) also promote inequalities by creating powerlessness among large sections of poor people, including women. Feudalism perpetuates an unsafe environment where the disempowered in general, and girls/women in particular, are vulnerable to assault, kidnapping, physical violence and honor killing, which is often socially and until recently, legally condoned (Qureshi & Rarieya, 2007).

The above attitudes find sympathy in a rigid, restrictive and often misleading interpretation of the status of women in Islam which is also used to create barriers for women’s access to family and public resources. For instance, particular social and cultural contexts confine women to their reproductive role within the four walls of the home, denying them the right to education or productive activity. From this perspective, girl’s education does not have much positive value and is, in fact, perceived to have a negative impact on women’s morals and poses a threat to the sociocultural, political and economic set up (Qureshi & Rarieya, 2007).

**Poverty**

Poverty is cited as one of the major reasons for female non-enrollment in most research studies, in Pakistan. Related is the demand for child labor. Data suggest that the opportunity costs for schooling, in Pakistan, are higher for daughters than for sons. Young girls undertake more domestic chores, such as housework, care for younger
siblings and collection of fodder than their brothers do. Moreover, economic returns are not associated with girls’ education, as much as with boys. While boys are expected to contribute to the family income and status, any returns to investment in girls’ education are seen to accrue not to the parents, but to the family in which she is married. Traditional taboos on women’s employment, poor employment opportunities, in general and for women in particular, poor facilities for women to reach their work place, and poor conditions of work make investment in girls’ education unrewarding for most parents (Mak, 1996; Qureshi & Rarieya, 2007).

**Labor Force Participation of Women in Pakistan**

Women’s employment is a difficult subject to deal with. There are ambiguities regarding the definition of employment, such as the type of activities (agricultural work at home or family help), which are not included in employment rates. In Pakistan, there has been no consensus on the percentage of women in the labor force, since different sources render widely different estimates. Women’s economic participation is greatly underestimated, in official statistics, mainly due to unsuitable methods of data collection, inappropriate definition of activities and stress on recording only one activity, and the cultural inhibition against reporting women’s work outside the home (Mak, 1996; Qureshi & Rarieya, 2007).

According to the 1981 census, of the total economically active population, in Pakistan, only 3.7 percent women were in the labor force compared with 96.3 percent of males. According to the 1998 (the latest statistics available) census only 2.23 percent women were in labor force, compared to 59.24 percent men (Population Census
Organization, 2008). The official data totally ignore women’s participation in domestic, unorganized, or informal sectors. Most males do not work at home, while most women try to combine productive activity and household chores. Since a large number of households subsist in absolute poverty, the assumption that more than 90 percent of women perform only nonincome-generating domestic chores is inconceivable. There are a whole range of productive activities in which women engage and fully participate with men, but their input goes unrecognized. Much of the increase in women’s employment has been taking place outside the formal sector. While most women in the informal sector have little formal schooling, education is required in the formal sector, for women, to obtain gainful employment. Within the formal sector women are concentrated in a few occupational groups, such as teachers and nurses (Mak, 1996; Qureshi & Rarieya, 2007).

Non-Formal Education

NFE for women is inadequate, in Pakistan. In general, the non-formal system comprises mosque schools, mohalla schools [community schools], women’s education centers, village workshops, and adult literacy community centers. These programs, mainly impart literacy and vocational training which often includes traditional skills, such as knitting and embroidery which are not likely to generate income. Mosques have traditionally offered religious education. In recent years, the Women’s Division of the government of Pakistan has sponsored numerous programs of skills training for women (Mak, 1996).

The EFA Reports (2000, 2001, and 2005) on Pakistan have a section on the programs administered by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) which imparts
details, such as the fact that NGOs in Pakistan have been involved with the promotion of literacy and adult education since 1990. Though the report on NGOs delineates which NGO was working in which province and on which project, no figures were given on how many men and women were enrolled and how many successfully completed the programs.

Typically, NGOs have supported the existing Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) or have motivated community members to: (a) send their girls to school, (b) participate in opening schools for girls, (c) agree to find local female teachers for their school, and (c) manage schools (Qureshi & Rarieya, 2007).

Generally, NGO’s initiatives are small and restricted to a few districts and communities, but they are important in developing viable models for increasing female participation and raising awareness through advocacy for girls’ education. However, successful mainstreaming of these strategies has been difficult because they require high initial investment in terms of committed and capable individuals in education system and in the community (Qureshi & Rarieya, 2007).

NGOs, such as Bunyad have organized adult literacy programs for women, since 1994 (Bunyad, 2011). They are often known as functional literacy programs, and small income generation schemes such as micro-credit or provision of sewing machines are attached to these. The contents of adult literacy materials used in the programs attempt to bring about a positive effect of basic literacy and education on the social and economic status of women. Information on some of the small economic activities, such as growing
vegetables, chicken farming, etc., is included in some of the programs (Qureshi & Rarieya, 2007).

The projects designed by these NGOs provide basic education and vocational training, but they do not touch the more controversial issues entrenched in the sociocultural sphere, such as domestic violence or women’s control over their earnings. Research studies have revealed that while education and economic independence are helpful to women struggling under oppression, they are not enough for these women to achieve emancipation. It seems vital that the NGOs address the sociocultural barriers, if the women are to realize a sense of independence and to some degree a freedom of choice (Afshar, 1998, 2000; Aksornkol, 1997).

**Need for and Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to try and discern the factors that facilitate, as well as the barriers in the way of women’s enrollment in literacy programs and what women wanted from education. Stromquist (1990) cites that educational participation and attainment of women reveal that it is the women from low-income social groups and low status affiliation who register the lowest levels of education. Clearly, although women suffer the consequences of an arbitrary social marker, gender is an attribute whose impact increases or becomes attenuated as it becomes associated with particular social class.

Qureshi and Rarieya (2007) are critical of NGOs that design literacy programs for women in Pakistan for not evaluating their programs; therefore, not being able to deal with questions, such as why women attend or not attend adult literacy classes, what they learn, what opportunities they have to use what they learned and how does literacy
impact women’s lives. For this reason, there is little understanding of what works in raising female literacy and in providing education for adolescent girls, in Pakistan. Such understanding could help in formulating policies and programs for basic education for women. This study tried to address how nonacademic factors, such as the social and cultural institutions create or block women’s incentives towards literacy projects in Pakistan.

There was a need for a more emic understanding of the processes that those women who do enter the literacy programs go through to get enrolled in these programs. The fact that these women were willing and able to enter the literacy projects, in spite of the obstacles, such as poverty, family and societal restraints and lack of educational facilities, raised the need to probe into the sociocultural processes that were supportive to these women, as well as those that proved to be barriers in their quest for education. The EFA Reports, (2000, 2001 and 2005) cite some of the obstacles in the achievement of literacy, but again, they do not represent the whole picture – a picture that embodies the women’s point of view. A qualitative study of women’s views would allow a far richer understanding of the process, and in so doing, a clearer understanding of how to ensure that the underrepresented women gain equal access to education.

**Research Questions**

The broad question that this study attempted to research is: What are the facilitators and obstacles for lower Socio Economic Status (SES) women in Pakistan to join and continue in (NFE) programs? And what do women want from education?
The sub-questions are: As perceived by potential and actual or former participants and staff:

- What major factors determine women’s access to education?
- What major barriers do women encounter in their quest for education?
- What are the major educational needs of these women - as they see them?

Further research questions evolved as the researcher pursued new themes that emerged in the interviews with the participants, professionals, and paraprofessionals who work with women in the NGO (H. Rubin & I. Rubin, 2005).

**Definition of Terms**

**Social Class**

In South Asia, almost everybody has membership in a social class. Although, women of higher socioeconomic status have been discriminated against and still continue to be, they have still enjoyed more political weight and access to privileges than have women of lower socioeconomic status. Therefore, it would be a mistake, for instance to assume that power relations and distribution in the middle class can be applied to the lower socioeconomic classes.

For the purpose of this study, low SES, in South Asia, is defined in the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for Asia Pacific, Goal 1 (2000) as:

The percentage of the population living on less than $1.08 a day at 1993 international prices. The one dollar a day poverty line is compared to consumption or income per person and includes consumption from own production and income in kind. This poverty line has fixed purchasing power
across countries and areas and is often called an “absolute poverty line” or measure of extreme poverty.

**Feminism**

Feminism was a crucial component of this study’s design, as quite obviously, the study involved issues that were concerned with the structural position and existential experiences of women. There is general agreement, in feminist research, that highlighting the experiences of women through research and allowing their voices to be heard may go a long way to making the inequalities more widely recognized and may also encourage political action to redress oppressive practices. This was also one of the goals that this study endeavored to achieve through investigating the educational experiences of the women from the lower social class strata (Grbich, 2007).

**Researcher Role**

The decision of how to present one’s own self is very important, because how one’s self is *cast* leaves a profound impression on the participants and has great influence on the success and/or failure of the study. This is not to imply that the researcher is not able to make the attempt to see the situation from the participant’s perspective, but to pretend to be an absolute part of the lifestyle and the cultural ramifications that lifestyle accrues is to take on a façade that is counterproductive to establishing the crucial rapport (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

Qualitative researchers do not always like to be committed, in advance, to developing the theoretical implications of their work in any particular direction; they believe this should flow from the emergent data. Nevertheless, scholars suggest that
emerging conceptual framework and themes must be clearly stated and linked to the existing empirical literature. Therefore, this study followed the advice, and explored the issues that have already been investigated and kept a close watch for any new concepts and questions that might surface from this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Guba, 1990).

**Personal Interest**

I had been an educator, in Pakistan, before I moved to the United States. I used to teach English as a second language in a girls’ college. During my teaching experience, I realized that I was not having much impact on the students as far as their learning was concerned, as all that the students were doing was memorizing and reproducing the material in their textbooks. Yet there was hardly any actual training available for teachers that could equip them with effective teaching methods. Hence, when I moved to the U.S., I enrolled in Teaching English as a Second Language and subsequently Cultural Foundations program to expand my knowledge about pedagogy, as well as educational systems employed in the U.S. and in the other countries.

The fact that I come from an upper middle class family background in Pakistan can perhaps explain my ability to make choices and develop professionally. Women like me have relatively greater access to education and employment and consequently have more freedom and control over their lives. I know that in the context of larger Pakistan, the overall literacy rate is 54 percent and girls’/women’s literacy rate is a dismal 45 percent, thereby denying women access to many opportunities to improve their lives.
(EFA Report, 2011). The nature and degree of women’s oppression and subordination does vary across classes, regions, and urban/rural divide.

Some incidents stay in our minds and keep jogging our memory. As I was looking for a topic for my dissertation, one or two such events would keep rearing up in my mind. While I was growing up, in Pakistan, my family used to have a gardener come over to mow the lawn, and tend to the general upkeep of the yard, while his wife took care of some odd chores around the house. They could just barely take care of their family with the money that they both made. They had a mentally handicapped daughter who could scarcely take care of her own needs. The parents had given her in marriage to a family who were not much better off than they. The girl who could not even take care of herself bore three or four children, successively. Once, when the young mother was visiting her parents, the mother brought her along when she came to work. My mom asked the mother how the daughter was coping, and whether the in-laws were kind enough to not beat her. The mother very matter-of-factly replied, “That happens.”

This incident brings into sharp focus the dilemmas of the women belonging to the lower socioeconomic strata, in Pakistan, and how far economic independence and/or education can be instrumental in the emancipation of these women? In effect, this personal experience directed me towards focusing on the socioeconomic, as well as cultural constraints on these women’s lives, and provoked questions, such as, how do some women prevail over those constraints to acquire education, what restraints they face in their pursuit, what does education do for them, and what are their educational needs, in their view.
Analytical Framework

The analytical framework of the data is comprised of two phases, the first phase entails the *empowerment capabilities approach* which was developed by Seeberg based on Sen’s (1999); Kabeer’s, (1999); Nussbaum’s (2000); and Unterhalter’s (2007) human development and capability approach. This framework is used to bring out the voices of the women: what the women value and why concerning their education and how what they value affects their well-being. It is hoped that this analysis will lead to an understanding of the process of empowerment. The second phase will be an analysis of the factors that facilitate and obstruct the process of emancipation.

Implications

It is my hope that this study will help inform the national government and the NGOs, in Pakistan, and induce them to address the sociocultural aspects of women’s lives. Consequently, leading to an advancement in literacy and hence, the quality of women’s lives.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Illiteracy is a manifestation of the unequal distribution of power and resources in society. It is characteristically found among urban and rural poor and among women in rural areas and in marginal urban sectors. However, there are those women who despite the conditions and circumstances that constrain them are motivated to enroll in and sustain through literacy projects. This suggests that there are some positive influences in these women’s lives that enable them to persevere in their pursuit of education.

The first section in this chapter focuses on the socioeconomic influences in the lives of women that shape women’s situated decisions about education. The second section discusses the function of nonformal education in promoting literacy and the function of NGOs in reaching the goals of literacy through the provision of nonformal education.

Background: On the Sociocultural Influences on Pakistani Women’s Current Educational and Emancipation Status

This section discusses the differences and commonalities between industrial and agrarian patriarchies. Furthermore, colonization is described as a reinforcing force, where patriarchy is concerned, due to the economic benefits that accrued to the colonizers. This section also describes feudalism and its repercussions for women’s subordination. This part of the chapter also tries to highlight the ramifications of patriarchy, feudalism and
colonialism on women’s decisions regarding their body, education and employment, especially for women living in societies that are shaped by Islamic conventions, embedded in the culture and traditions of the society.

**Patriarchy**

This section discusses the differences and commonalities between industrial and agrarian patriarchies. Moreover, this part of the chapter also tries to highlight the ramifications of patriarchy on women’s decisions regarding their body, education and employment, especially poor women.

While apparently universal, the particular structure of patriarchy at any given moment is always historically determined, as it is formed in conjunction with specific social and cultural structures with religious interpretations embedded within.

Patriarchy means the rule of the father. This refers not just to male power over females, but a comprehensive social system based on the domination of the patriarch or male head of family-clan over all the human persons and things over which he rules. These persons may be defined in various ways as dependent on him and serving him - wife (wives), children, dependent relatives, servants, slaves, animals, and land (Joseph, 1993; Kandiyoti, 1988; Reuther, 1998; Teresa, 1988).

According to historians, poor working women had several disadvantages compared with men from time immemorial. Most of the textile workshops in Egypt and Greece were operated by female slave labor, and many services were rendered by slave women in the Mediterranean cities. Since slaves were provided only subsistence basics, a double force operated to give free women pittance wages: (a) the availability of slave
labor and (b) the imaginary concept of male head of household. The woman supposedly had someone to support her, and so her wages needed only to be supplemental (Boulding, 1976; Teresa, 1988).

It appears that in any setting, urban or rural, in any period of history for which data is available one fifth to one-half of heads of households were women. Many of these women were rearing children without male partners; because of widowhood, desertion, divorce; or because they were plural wives infrequently visited by the husband; yet they had full responsibility for the care and feeding of their children. Most of these women, except for the wealthy, had to struggle to make ends meet. They had to accept low wages, established through the male support conception and the competition with slave labor (Boulding, 1976; Teresa, 1988).

Modern liberal democratic societies partly reshaped the patriarchal economic and social relations. The consequence of this reshaping of the socioeconomic order was that domestic labor was subsumed under the profit-making production of commodities. The outcome of this new order was the increased dependence of women, since it served to augment the relative importance of the area of men’s domination. Men’s control over women’s labor was adapted by the wage-labor system, but it was not eliminated. In the labor market the domineering position of men was sustained by sex-ordered job-segregation. Women’s jobs were lower-paid, considered less skilled, and often involved less exercise of authority or control (Ruether, 1998).

Under capitalism, the kinship relations and exchanges characterizing previous (agricultural) patriarchal societies were displaced by new class relations and commodity
exchange. The domestic economy – the production of life - specifically subsistence goods and human life was subsumed under the privileged, profit-making production of commodities in terms of wage labor – the production of things. At the same time domestic labor was literally de-valued as non-wage labor. One of the main contradictions of patriarchal capitalism is that the system of gender-differentiated power and property relations is eroded by the labor demands of capitalism itself. Women are periodically required as a cheap and available source of wage-labor at various levels of the economy, from manual to professional, while some men in turn engage in aspects of non-wage domestic labor. In order to perform the work required of them as they enter the (wage) labor force, women find it necessary to acquire cultural attributes previously reserved for men (such as assertiveness, analytical thinking, ambition, and leadership), while the men who become involved in the domestic realm assume traits usually assigned to females (such as nurturance, emotionality, and tenderness). The differentiations between masculine and feminine increasingly collapse under the pressure of capitalism, yet patriarchy finds new ways to perpetuate male privilege, making sure that wages, property ownership, control over production, and political power remain largely gender differentiated (Ebert, 1988; Hartmann, 1976; Murray, 1995).

Hartmann (1976) argues that while capitalism brought about the changes mentioned above, in the women’s work-life, it nevertheless, in removing work from home, served to increase the subordination of women, since it served to increase the relative importance of the area of men’s domination. With the separation of work from home, men became less dependent on women for industrial production, while women
became more dependent on men economically. But it is important to remember that men’s domination was already established and it clearly influenced the direction and shape that capitalist development took.

Men acted to enforce job segregation in the labor market; they utilized trade-union associations and strengthened the division of labor at home and in the workplace requiring women to look after housework, child care, and related chores. Women’s subordinate position in the labor market reinforced their subordinate position in the family, and that in turn reinforced their labor-market position. Men’s attempts to exclude women from the labor market is explained not by capitalism but by patriarchy; men wanted to assure that women continued to perform the appropriate tasks at home. A widespread belief was that if the morals of the married or unmarried females were to improve it would be much better if they were occupied in performing the domestic duties at home than following the never-tiring motion of machinery (Hartmann, 1976).

**Feudalism**

Feudalism, a large part of the Pakistani agricultural sector, also plays a significant role in curbing the autonomy of women living under the feudal system. Ganshoff (1964); Herlihy (1971); Hilton (1992); Martin (1983) and Walker (1976); contend that feudalism is a system of economic production founded upon feudal rent, which means reliance on force and not on incentives to secure labor and support from the workers. It is not exactly slavery, as the peasant was not chattel and could not be moved about at the lord’s will.

Boulding (1976); Herlihy (1970) and Middleton (1981) contend that most of the feudal impositions, which seem to have arisen from feudal oppression, are merely an
extension of patriarchal controls, already in operation. The measures directed against
women, such as forced-marriage or a source of free labor, cannot be comprehended
solely in terms of class interest and the immediate class struggle.

Boulding (1976) and Middleton (1981) further argue that the oppression of
peasant women in the feudal economy is to be explained less in terms of the immediate
labor process, than by reference to the apparatus erected to maintain the feudal mode of
exploitation – i.e. by the structures for social reproduction (including biological
procreation) whereby an appropriately exploitable class is continually in the process of
being reconstituted.

The essential instrument of feudal appropriation is a rent calculated on the basis
of the size of the peasant holding. Whereas the typical rent-form on the land is a money
payment, the most distinctive feature of vassalage tenures is labor rent, i.e. the obligation
to perform unpaid labor-service for the lord. This gives the lord a vested interested in the
development of a more highly segregated sexual division of labor. The men work in the
fields while the women work as agricultural laborers as well as in the Lord’s household
as domestics (Ganshof, 1964; Middleton, 1991).

Under both systems of landholding and inheritance, several related conditions
define the subordinate position of peasant women. The first and most decisive of these is
the link between landholdings, marriage, and legitimate procreation. Primogeniture is a
strategy designed to maintain and further promote relations of class power. It also
structures relations of hierarchy between men and, crucially, between sexes. Social
control of fertility is the pinnacle upon which the feudal oppression rests (Boulding, 1976; Ganshof, 1964; Middleton, 1981; Teresa, 1988).

Regulation of marriage is of crucial importance in the maintenance of a tenant population. Marriage requires the lord’s permission. If a vassal woman marries outside the manor, the lord demands a higher payment for marriage as compensation for the loss of her person and progeny (Martin, 1983; Walker, 1976).

In the feudal context, as in all other class systems, the propagation of the species is inextricably linked with the social reproduction of property relations. In essence, this reproduction requires that sufficient children be raised to meet future demands for labor on the manor and the holdings, and the creation of heirs – preferably male – to smooth the process of transmission. Hence, it is easy to see why the landlord class should have come to hold these objectives; but equally important is the fact that the male tenantry developed similar attitudes in response to the conditions of their tenure. In the eyes of both, the satisfactory management of the peasant women is contingent on two groups: first, those who marry and produced children and, second, those who, remaining single, must be kept chaste (Boulding, 1976; Ganshof, 1964; Middleton, 1981).

A wife is expected to obey her husband implicitly, as dictated by custom and social tradition, and the laws of wifely duties described by religion, although most often, as interpreted by the clergy. Such extensive control by the husband is bound to render the wife materially dependent. Any dissent from absolute obedience could lead to violence as retribution (Boulding, 1976; Ganshof, 1964; Middleton, 1981).
Colonialism and Muslim Women

Western Europe and North America, up into the twentieth century, were involved in a vast project of colonization in which the people and land of much of the globe (Central and South America, the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and the Pacific Islands) was appropriated to serve the power and wealth of the colonizing nations and their dominant classes. Only after World War II was there a major process of decolonization of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. But these areas of former colonization, today, find justice and well-being eluding them in a worldwide market system ruled by global capitalism (Ruether, 1998).

In most parts of the Muslim world, some of the socio-economic, political and cultural developments, especially, civil society, women’s movements and feminist discourse, so critical for the development of equal rights, are still very weak. Part of the problem lies in the legacy of colonialism and the distinct nature and process of modernization in the Muslim world; which has been rapid, uneven, exogenous, elitist and state-centered, top-down and authoritarian (Bodman & Tohidi, 1998; Tohidi, 2003).

With Bangladesh as the backdrop, Alam (1998) and Tohidi (2003) illustrate how the Islamic community was transformed in response to colonial modernity. They argue that contemporary politics of Islamic fundamentalism and its relation to women’s rights, in most Muslim countries, should be understood in the context of its response to colonialism. The goal of Islamic modernism in South Asia was to accommodate traditional Islamic principles within Western modernity. Muslim leaders urged Indian Muslims to learn English and secure jobs in the colonial government. Yet there was no
change in women’s position. These Muslim modernists argued that limiting women’s education to domestic chores and religious teachings insulated them from the corrupting influences of the public realm.

Alam (1998) and Tohidi (2003) further explain that one outcome of the nationalist discourse that took root during the modernization period, was to subsume the question of women. The nationalist leaders had situated the woman question in an inner domain of sovereignty, far removed from the arena of political contest with the colonial state. Thus, the nationalist discourse, according to Alam (1998), carries with it the material/spiritual split that corresponds to the ideological dichotomy of two social spaces – outer and home. The outer world is conceived of as unimportant, external, and the domain of material world governed by Western rationality. By contrast, the inner world represents the true spiritual self, untouched by profane activities, with women as its true representatives. This dichotomy was also the principle through which the nationalist’s resolved the woman question. By making the inner world superior to the outer world of Western modernity, the nationalists attempted to reconcile the modernist ideals of equality and liberty. Thus, Western education (read modernity) for women was to make them good wives and mothers, to teach them to run their households according to the new physical and economic conditions of the modern world. They might even be allowed into the outside world as long as it did not threaten their femininity and interfere with their womanly responsibilities. The nationalist construction of the new woman continues today in the postcolonial Bangladesh, as well as other post-colonial Muslim countries.
Describing colonialism in Muslim Arab countries, Cooke, (2000) expresses sentiments similar to those of Afshar (1998); Alam (1998) and Tohidi (2003). Cooke (2003) argues that the European colonizers found themselves obliged to respect the line that separated the private from the public. To be able to rule men effectively, they had to leave the women in their segregated spaces. Women’s autobiographies as well as court records describe a place of privacy where the colonizer could not go. This history that mentions them at most as anonymous resisters and survivors also leaves them out of the educational and professional opportunities available to the men through the Western world. The aftermath of the women’s segregated spaces, and the relationship that the men were locked into with the colonizers, influences the choices that men and women make in the current social order, as well.

Stromquist (1990) very effectually argues that it may not be in the State’s (or the colonizers’) best interest to modify the status quo dramatically. If we look for reasons for which the state would want to respect the gender status quo, it is clear that the belief that women are inferior to men could not persist, independent of some reason that makes this belief a good choice. If this belief were simply anchored in a non-material cultural tradition, we would expect to see a great deal of variability in the status of women across societies and across time, presumably discrimination criteria would depend on fads and thus be unstable. Yet we find a remarkable consistency across cultures in the identification of women as inferior. If we compare the range of career, occupation, and life options open to women and men as groups, in the final analysis men would emerge as the privileged group. Women do receive lower salaries in the public world and they can
fulfill more duties at home precisely because they are less competitive in the outside world. The ideology of women’s inferiority develops dynamics of its own and becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy as women are also assigned inferior economic roles.

**Non-formal Education and Lower Socioeconomic Status Women**

NFE is a viable option for rural and urban poor and especially women in developing countries, the reason being its flexibility and cost-effectiveness, as well as a low threat level to the patriarchal system that women in most of the developing countries have to exist within.

Although an upsurge of interest in non-formal education is relatively recent, organized human societies from the beginning have used various forms of non-formal education to transmit their heritage of values, customs, beliefs, technologies, and skills to each new generation; thus insuring the survival and integrity of these societies. The traditional apprenticeship system, for example, has done a remarkable job of developing skills required to maintain and repair products, such as motor vehicles and electrical equipment. These young apprentices and their master mechanics are a fairly common sight in countries such as Bangladesh, India and Pakistan (Coombs, 1976).

The current version of non-formal education is defined, as a convenient label covering a bewildering assortment of organized educational activities outside the formal system that are intended to serve identifiable learning needs of particular subgroups in any given population – be they children, youths, or adults, males or females (Bray, 1985; Coombs, 1976; Grandstaff, 1976; NFE Manual, 2004).
While La Belle (1984) has little difficulty accepting this definition; she believes that we have come to view these educational modes as discrete entities. To show the problems derived from treating the definitions as discrete entities, La Belle (1984) gives the example of an educational anthropologist who studies child rearing practices in a rural neighborhood; generally, this kind of education would be referred to as informal education. The educational anthropologist, however, encounters directed, preplanned instruction by parents to their children in the areas of cooking, weaving, cultivation, planting, and so on. The question now is: need we classify this parental instruction as non-formal rather than informal?

La Belle (1984) claims that her major concern in attempting to broaden the perception of these educational processes lies with the potential of including the secondary characteristics of each mode in an analysis of any one mode. Thus, in non-formal education, one need not be constrained by only the instructional aspects associated with microsocial change efforts, but also can be concerned with secondary and prospectively more important participatory experiences as well.

Echoing similar views, M. Ahmed (1982) posits that formal, non-formal, and informal modes of learning can and should constitute the building blocks of a nationwide comprehensive learning network in each country, cemented into one meaningful mosaic by the concept of lifelong and recurrent learning opportunities for all. The mix and balance between formal and non-formal approaches for a specific learning objective, learner group, or a location will vary and change over time, and in each
situation the informal learning environment should play a reinforcing, facilitative and complementing role.

In actuality, Coombs (1976) is in agreement with LaBelle (1987) and Ahmed (1984) when he claims that to treat non-formal education as a separate and isolated sector the way formal education has generally been treated, instead of viewing it as a diversified flow of learning inputs that are essential to the nourishment of all kinds of development activities and sectors; would be to cut it off from the mainstream of social and economic development and to defeat its essential mission. All these authors, in fact, assert the same reality that of treating non-formal education as a continuum with formal and informal education, rather than a separate entity.

**Empowerment as Process**

Much of the emphasis upon the empowerment of the marginalized groups, such as the poor and women has been on economic and political empowerment. The dominant understanding of power has been of power as power over, where one person, or grouping of people is able to control in some way the actions or options of another. This can be overt; such as through the use of physical coercion; or hidden, when psychological processes are influenced in such a way as to restrict the range of options perceived; or to lead someone to perceive the desired option as being their own desire. The use of power over can be very subtle. A group of people who are systematically denied power and influence in the dominant society will internalize the messages it receives about its supposed roles and capacities, and will come to believe those messages to be true. This internalized oppression is adopted as a survival mechanism, but becomes so well
ingrained that the effects are mistaken for reality. Thus, for example, a woman who is subjected to violent abuse when she expresses her own opinion may start to withhold her opinions and eventually come to believe that she has no opinions of her own. When control becomes internalized in this way, overt use of power is no longer necessary (Afshar, 1998).

The development discourse, and the set of practices associated with it, has been based upon the view that women should somehow be brought into development and become empowered to participate within the economic and political structures of society. This view of empowerment focuses on delegation of power, i.e. on power as something which can be bestowed by one person upon another. The difficulty with this view of empowerment is that if it can be bestowed, it can just as easily be withdrawn; in other words, it does not involve a structural change in power relations. It is therefore illusory (Afshar, 1998).

There are however, other ways of understanding and conceptualizing power, which focus not just on a particular set of results but on process. Power can take other forms, variously described as power to, power with and power within; all of which allow the construction of a very different meaning for empowerment. In contrast to the obedience definition of power, this definition of power can be termed as energy definition of power. This is power which does not involve the domination of power over, but is a power which is generative, for example, the power some people have of stimulating activity in others and raising their morale. One aspect of this power to is the kind of leadership which comes from the wish to see a group achieve what it is capable of, where
there is not necessarily any conflict of interest and the group is setting its own agenda. It is a form of power which can persuade or open new possibilities (Afshar, 1998).

Edwards (2000) contends that it is often unclear exactly who is to be empowered – the individual, the community or categories of people such as women, the poor or the socially excluded. The question of how such categories of people might exercise agency are generally side-stepped. The individual is expected to take opportunities offered by development projects to better him/her situation and so contribute to the development of the group or community. The mechanisms of such empowerment are either startlingly clear (for example, empowerment of the individual through cash transactions in the market) or conveniently fuzzy (as in the assumed benefits to individuals of participation in management committees). The scope and limitations of the empowering effects of any project are little explored.

There seems to be a need, Edwards (2000) suggests, to conceptualize participatory processes more broadly and for a more complex analyses of the linkages between intervention, participation and empowerment. We need to understand better the non-project nature of people’s lives, the complex livelihood linkages that make an impact in one area are likely to be felt in others and the potential for unintended consequences arising from any intended intervention or act. Edwards (2000) cites that a move away from narrow project approaches can be substituted with the concept of social inclusion. The concept of social inclusion emphasizes involvement in the structures and institutions of society – most fundamentally, the participatory and communicative structures, including new forms of social partnership through which a shared sense of the public
good is created and debated. Edwards (2000) stresses that with the emerging reconsideration of the role of the state in development, the time is ripe for a critical analysis of participation. Meaningful social change can take place by state action prompted by powerful social movements.

Analyses of competent communities and successful participatory projects that focus on process, on power dynamics or patterns of inclusion and exclusion would involve more process documentation and analysis of conflict, consensus building and decision-making within communities, not just those activities that are related to the particular development project in hand (Edwards, 2000).

**Current Educational and Emancipation Status of Women:**

**Facilitative and Obstructive Factors**

Sutton and Arnove (2004) studied the execution of the Teacher Empowerment Program (TEP), in India. They posit that the most important element of TEP is the active participation and decision making of the participants. If the people whose welfare is intended are involved in the task, they will gain confidence and find themselves capable of continuing the efforts on their own.

Recognizing the extreme poverty of some communities, Bunyad (a Pakistani NGO) introduced education in ways that enabled economic activity to continue. Bunyad worked intensively with communities right from the start to induce full understanding of what was proposed and put the selection of the teachers in the hands of the local people. This meant that the communities took ongoing responsibility for the education of their girls (Afshar, 1998; Bunyad, 2011; Mukhtar & Khalid, 2000).
Maddox (2008); Nussbaum (2006) and K. Sen (2003) posit that in-spite of all the barriers women do value the opportunity to learn as adults. In fact, most women, according to the studies done in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan were committed to education (for themselves and their children) and struggled to be able to attend the literacy classes. Maddox (2008) further explains that women in his study in Bangladesh said that they enjoyed reading school books with their children, and they could also write accounts for their share-cropping. They were also clear about the value of becoming literate, saying that it had given them confidence and that they previously feared literacy, but now felt confident.

The starting point in Mahila Samakhya (a literacy project for women in India) did not impose literacy or traditional education on women, but generated demand for literacy and education by linking literacy with empowerment. Women were allowed to seek education at a point when it’s meaning and value becomes evident to them. The way literacy classes were organized provided an opportunity to a large number of women learners to meet, talk, share, and break their isolation; which is socially structured in their lives. A study of the project shows that women learners had a strong desire to learn. They liked to go to the literacy classes because a literacy class gave them an opportunity to meet others and study collectively. Thus, literacy classes provided women learners with a social space, away from home, and offered them an opportunity to meet in a group to share their common experiences about work, family, and illness. Participation of women in literacy classes was also facilitated when literacy classes took into consideration
constraints that poor women face in terms of time, space and social expectations. These are undoubtedly some important considerations for a literacy campaign (Patel, 2003). It is widely reported in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka that girls run the risk of being harassed, assaulted, abducted, or even murdered on the way to or from school. Girls who live at some distance from the school are particularly vulnerable; the further they have to travel to school, the more remote the area, the greater the potential risk. In Madya Pradesh, India, the Education Guarantee Scheme has initiated the practice of para-teachers or helpers collecting girl children from their homes and dropping them off each day at school to ensure enrollment and security. Schools are constructed within a one mile radius from the homesteads (Unterhalter, 2007). Additionally, women do not attend literacy classes, if they don’t anticipate any gains after completion of the literacy project, such as a job or vocational training (N. Ahmed, 2000; Kelly, 1999).

It is girls who walk great distances to fetch water for domestic use and also play a major role in watering the animals; this makes their labor an important contribution to the household economy. Flexibility in the timing of the school day and annual calendar of the school is very important in relation to workloads, and these all need to be examined for their different impact on girls and boys. Depending on the context, successful initiatives to include girls and to support them to remain in school and complete a basic education might include girls-only schools and female animators (mobilizers) working in the community. The mobilizers help to tackle some of these issues by working with parents to change negative attitudes towards girls and schooling, and to reinforce the right to an
education. By linking closely with parents, the mobilizers have helped fathers and mothers to understand the benefits of schooling for their daughters. As relatively well-educated local women in paid employment, the mobilizers serve as positive examples for local girls. Some examples of successful efforts include community schools, which provide education within short school days that are organized around girls’ domestic responsibilities, and intensive lobbying of the community on the value of girls’ education. In the long term, it is necessary to change the conditions of the formal and informal labor markets, establish equal wages and conditions of work, and thus demonstrate that educated girls do have improved incomes and quality of life (Unterhalter, 2007).

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that women face varied and multiple levels of barriers to literacy, foremost of which are socio-cultural and those related to poverty.

The preference for sons and the advantages attached to them result in discrimination against daughters. Such discrimination usually affects women’s access to social resources, such as education. Patriarchal culture provides multiple incentives for preferential treatment of boys. An investment in schooling for boys tends to have much larger economic payoffs than an investment for girls. Moreover, exposure of girls to new ideas and social contacts beyond the confines of the household can threaten to undermine the very basis of sexual and ideological control of women by their families (Stromquist, 1990).

In observing gender disparities in education, it is clear that we are confronting a phenomenon that affects women across classes, cultures, and levels of development.
Stromquist (1990) and Wadud (2006) efficaciously contend that the main cause of women’s subordination originates from power relations based on sexual differences. An ideological system is constructed around the notions of sexuality and motherhood. This system – known as patriarchy – defines men as superior to women and is defended through an intricate web of values, norms and institutions. This arrangement – woman-wife-mother – associates certain menial tasks with the female member of the family, and relegates her to a role that is defined by services that are barely recognized and rarely warrant praise in the larger social and political system. Nevertheless, when these tasks fail to produce the kind of offspring deemed desirable, she, and in many cases she alone, is castigated for this failure.

In countries with low level of development, motherhood is construed as not even requiring literacy. Household tasks require knowledge and organizational skills; they are not dumb tasks; yet they can be acquired through oral, informal methods. In countries that have almost exclusive motherhood roles for women, Pakistan being a case in point, the result is that there are extremely high rates of illiteracy among women and a high dropout rate after primary schooling. Besides, since men have been assigned predominance in the public sphere; and this sphere relies on educational credentials for many transactions; it is more important to ensure men’s education first (Stromquist, 1990).

School participation and attainment by girls in developing countries shows that family decisions are powerful determinants of the probability that daughters will enroll, attend, and continue in school. Stromquist (1990) argues that it has been observed that
parents assign girls more domestic responsibilities than they give to boys. In the case of 
poor households, girls represent important labor that the family cannot forego by 
allowing them to go to school. Thus, even if schools are available and girls enroll, 
patterns of girls’ poor attendance leading to dropping out tend to emerge. In the case of 
girls from better off families, parents are able to afford their daughters’ presence in 
school, but norms about the appropriate role of women (i.e. being married and having 
children) discourage parents from investing significantly in the education of their 
daughters. Women who reach the university level are not only few but, in comparison 
with their male counterparts, tend to belong disproportionately to middle and upper-social 
classes. I recall vividly, all through my school and university days, my parents would 
encourage me to get an education, but preferably, in liberal arts as eventually I would get 
moved, and therefore, would not be a part of the work force.

The issue of women’s education, hence autonomy, is not quite that simple. It is 
quite clear from the research being done that women’s autonomy is very strongly 
dependent on kinship systems. Ross (1999) reports that educated and uneducated women 
in India and Pakistan, both report being intimidated by the responsibilities of autonomy 
and are constrained by structural powerlessness within the household and the community. 

Autonomy is a complex issue for Muslim women, due to constrictions that 
religion, family and society place on them. Changes in material conditions have seriously 
undermined the normative order of patriarchy; as poverty has placed severe strains on 
bonds of obligation between kin, more specifically, on men’s fulfillment of their 
obligations toward women; as it is the men in the family who are entrusted with the role
of breadwinner. The new global economy has increased the need for two wage earners to provide decently for the family. The choice for a mother to attend only to household and children is rare. Of course, poor families, the majority of the families in developing countries, never presumed such a choice (Wadud, 2006).

Cain; Khanam and Nahar (1979); Kandiyoti (1988) delineate Wadud’s (2006) point well. They write that almost a third of the widows in a village in Bangladesh were the heads of their households, struggling to make a living through waged work. However, the labor-market segmentations created and bolstered by patriarchy meant that their options for work were extremely restricted, and they also had to accept very low and uncertain wages. The kinship institutions that support male dominance and authority remained strong and intact, while the associated sanctions that ensure that males carry out their responsibilities to women weakened. With the pressure of increasing poverty, this outcome is predictable, since male authority is normatively controlled. Normative control, while powerful is nevertheless relatively malleable in the face of economic necessity.

Although the widows are the heads of the households and working to support their families: that, however, does not inevitably lead to economic independence. Economic independence is usually measured in terms of wage-earning economic activity. Therefore, for women in classic patriarchies; where wage-work is often unacceptable and poverty-induced; working for wages is not necessarily an indicator of autonomy. Jejeebhoy and Sathar (2001) have explained this point quite well. They write that wage-earning women are not likely to have made the decision to work on their own, nor
do they always have control of their earnings. Even in situations of dire need, families in classical patriarchy - in which women are secluded - may be reluctant to allow women to work for wages outside the family farm or business.

Under the impact of new market forces, such as capital penetration into rural areas or big multinational company investments filtering into the economy, the bases of classical patriarchy are crumbling. The question is: what are the consequences of this breakdown of the patriarchal order for women? Kandiyoti (1988) explains that the breakdown results in the earlier emancipation of younger men from their fathers and their earlier separation from the paternal household. While this process implies that women escape the control of mothers-in-law and head their own households at a much younger age; it also means that they themselves can no longer look forward to a future surrounded by subservient daughters-in-law. For the generation of women caught in between this transformation may represent genuine personal tragedy; since they have paid the heavy price of an earlier patriarchal system; but are not able to cash in on its promised benefits.

This nuclear family is not only the family of the male-female couple; it is also decidedly male-dominated. The cultural acknowledgement of the role of wage-earning member within the nuclear family is the male, leading to the assumption that the non-wage-earning female fulfills all other needs. It is assumed that this is natural and hence a voluntary contribution with no bearing upon female agency. In reality, women’s lives in the majority contexts are adversely affected by global economics that presume the fulfillment of multiple extended tasks without the domain of an equally extended family (Wadud, 2006).
As far as fertility is concerned, evidence has shown that while schooling brings issues of family size into the domain of women, the principal linkage of female schooling to the decline in fertility is part of a much wider change in the position of individual and the family within society (D. Kandiyoti, & A. Kandiyoti, 1987).

A reason that patriarchy may explain why women might favor high fertility more than men do is the difference between the sexes in schooling and in exposure to Western influences that arise in societies undergoing social modernization. As secular schooling spreads Western models of family and gender relations and Western attitudes toward personal fate and the adoption of innovations that result in a demand for fertility limitation also spread. By stressing a conjugally oriented family with relative equality between the sexes; in which children become the object of parental investment; rather than a source of parental income; and by inculcating a non-fatalistic, innovation-adoptive world view; schooling increases the perceived costs of children and also the perceived feasibility of limiting their numbers. Insofar as women in highly patriarchal settings receive less schooling and are isolated from modernizing influences; their orientation toward fertility is likely to remain more traditional than men’s, resulting in a higher demand for fertility limitation among men than among women. Of course, as social modernization proceeds, this inequality between the sexes may lessen. So long as the traditional institutions creating a division between the sexes are intact, however, the unequal exposure of women and men to modernizing influences is likely to persist and the preference for sons and the advantages attached to them will also result in higher fertility rates (Mason & Taj, 1987).
Patriarchy is a fact of life for women in most developing countries. With changing economies, women are entering the work force, but it does not necessarily mean that it will lead to economic independence and autonomy. Poverty is a crucial factor in bringing women out into the labor force. However, when patriarchy is in crisis the women lose their traditional security; but they also lose out in the labor market; the same sanctions of patriarchy that kept women from labor force work to keep the wages lower and uncertain for these women (D. Kandiyoti, & A. Kandiyoti, 1987).

Education is said to be the equalizer between social classes as well as gender. Although, enrollment in schools among girls might be increasing in developing countries; it does not necessarily lead to equality between genders, neither is there any evidence of a direct link between education and control of fertility. Fertility control depends on many complex factors that involve women’s position within the patriarchal family and the larger society (Mason & Taj, 1987).

**Male-Dominance**

Parvin (1993) defines dominance as a produced condition that restrains the exploited from knowing or achieving feasible alternatives and desirable choices and induces them to do the exploiter’s bidding. Dominance is accomplished by violence, landownership, religious indoctrination, monopolization of administrative and military knowledge and instruments. Similar instruments are used to constrain female opportunity and choice and to establish male-over-female dominance.

The attitude that male imams – who also have links to or are the ruling classes – can speak for women exclusively is so deeply rooted in the subconscious of
Muslim men that debate on women’s conditions without women’s participation comes very naturally. Not only do men, men’s experiences of the world and men’s ideas and imagination determine how Islam is defined, they also define Islam for women. Men have proposed what it means to be a Muslim on the presumption that the male experience is normative, essential and universal to all humankind. A close scrutiny of these presumptions reveals a strong influence of patriarchal traditions and these patriarchal formulations of Islamic law have always held a condescending and utilitarian perspective on women (Tohidi, 2003; Wadud, 2006).

In patriarchal Islamic societies, men and women are not simply considered different from one another as we speak of people differing in eye color, movie tastes or preferences; in every sphere of life, men are considered the normal human being; and women are abnormal; deficient because they are different from men. Not only is the female looked down upon, she is treated as an object in shari’a (Islamic laws) discussions, not as a discussant. The woman is a recipient of decisions, not a decision maker. Decisions concerning her role in the family and society are made from the perspective of those who do not and cannot share her experiences; therefore, she ends up being judged on the basis of second-hand perceptions. This is the one constant in all of the history of Islamic thought that seems the most difficult to extract in order for genuine female inclusive reforms (Tohidi, 2003; Wadud, 2006).

Although Pakistan started as a secular state, it was simultaneously created as a new state for the Muslims of India. This had specific legal implications: Pakistan’s legal system which was originally modeled after the British common law has become
increasingly entwined with other, religious legal traditions, specifically Islamic schools of law, creating a legal pluralism.

While international human agreements signed by the Pakistani government are partly introduced to the legal system, they clash with and are often overridden by other existing legal structures, particularly Shari’a law and customary codes. As such, Pakistan’s legal pluralism produces an inconsistent and often contradictory definition of women’s rights (Sechzer, 2004; Bovarnick, 2007).

**Violence**

The law that guides sexual behavior in Pakistan does not recognize a difference between forced and consensual intercourse. While decriminalizing marital rape it also limits the possibility of a rape victim lodging a complaint against a rapist who is not her husband. Hence, this law fails to protect women from sexual violence within the context of marriage as well as rape outside of marriage (Tohidi, 2003; Bovarnick, 2007).

This lack of commitment to protect women from rape and the preoccupation with women’s sexual conduct is underpinned by traditional gender categories that constitute women as repositories of honor. Controlling women’s sexuality is a central debate in traditional patriarchal societies and seen as a fundamental prerequisite to creating an orderly and well-functioning society. In many Pakistani communities, such as Pukthun society, women are traditionally conceptualized as the property of and a symbol of honor for her own family and later that of her husband. To maintain family honor a woman is put under strict control of her male relatives, until her ownership is passed to her husband’s family which then assumes total control over most aspects of her life. The
protection of honor is achieved through a strict enforcement of purdah (segregation between men and women) which derives from both Islam and South Asian traditions and reflects the traditional notion of women’s potential for causing fitna [chaos]. Thus, purdah (described in detail earlier, in this chapter) in this context, renders women’s bodies as a tool by which social order is maintained but also through which inter-family or community feuds are waged. In many rural communities, feudal rapes have traditionally served as an accepted form of vendetta. Men take revenge by raping each other’s mothers, wives, daughters or sisters, or parading them naked in the streets to demonstrate to the community that revenge has been taken. Rather than taking revenge by fighting each other directly men wage war through women’s bodies. Because women act as proxies their victimization is not acknowledged, but instead transferred back to the men whose honor they represent. Women are made to fight the enemy in the front line of a war that is waged by men (Bovarnick, 2007).

Rape and honor are hence inextricably linked, as women provide the commodity – honor they cannot possess it in the same way as men can. Because women are objectified, they lose a sense of individuality in the community. The rape of a woman thus robs a man of his most prized commodity, his honor, while simultaneously obliterating women’s whole being. Women are therefore caught up in a vicious circle. Once a man’s honor is violated, customary codes prescribe that he should seek revenge by raping his enemies’ women. Once a woman is raped, however, many families cannot bear the shame and relinquish it by honor killings, creating a vicious circle of escalating violence (Bovarnick, 2007).
The traditional concept of women as possessions or dependents also informs how customary codes regulate divorce. In the cultural context of many communities in Pakistan, divorce is connected to the destruction of family honor by enabling another man to appropriate the husband’s honor symbolized by his wife. Therefore, although divorce is permitted under Shari’a law, customary codes often make divorce socially and practically impossible.

**Female Sexuality and Segregation**

No single issue has been fraught with as much contradiction as that of Muslim women’s sexed subjectivity. D. Kandiyoti, and A. Kandiyoti, (1987) describe it as the mode of control of female sexuality; this practice of segregation has a direct bearing on how gender is internalized. Corporate control over female sexuality becomes strikingly evident in the large number of different individuals who see themselves as immediately responsible for ensuring women’s appropriate sexual conduct. Parents, siblings, near and distant relatives, and even neighbors closely monitor the movements of the postpubescent girl. In societies where marriage is still defined as the formation of family alliances, it’s not up to the individual woman to find a husband. Against this background, the equation of love with marriage and notions of romantic love find less fertile ground to flourish. Emotional attachment is often expected to develop after marriage. In the traditional context, especially if it involves extended family living, little overt displays of interest in one’s spouse are encouraged and few occasions of intimacy are allowed outside the marital bedroom.
A central consequence of corporate control over female sexuality, in this context, is the close connection between female sexual purity and family or lineage honor. Women are vested with immense negative power because any misbehavior on their part can bring shame and dishonor to the male members of the community. Strict external constraints are placed on women, which may range from total seclusion and veiling to severe restrictions of their movements and their access to public places (Feldman, 2001; D. Kandiyoti, & A. Kandiyoti, 1987).

The very strictness of the controls placed on female sexuality gives women’s femininity the status of an inalienable, permanent property. It is an ascribed status rather than something chosen. The same cannot be said of men’s masculinity. Masculinity is not ascribed, but is an achieved status, one that is never permanently achieved, because the danger of being unmanned is ever present. It may not be surprising to find that in cultures which control female sexuality rigidly and at the same time require that men flaunt their prowess; men are intensely preoccupied with possible loss of sexual identity. This state of affairs could partially account for the persistent element of danger associated with the female sex, an element that introduces the possibility of subjugation through violence; especially, if female behavior is construed as a slight against masculinity and male honor (D. Kandiyoti, & A. Kandiyoti, 1987).

D. Kandiyoti, and A. Kandiyoti, (1987) further argue that the relationship between Muslim women’s gender roles and professional roles is extremely paradoxical. Their sense of gender, while strong, does not seem to permeate their being in the same diffuse, persistent way that it does Western women’s in most cross-sex interaction.
situations, including professional ones. It may be that the very rigidity of cultural definitions of femininity helps redefine women in positions of power as non-female or at least asexual. A variety of cultural mechanisms are specially mobilized to construct some cross-sexual encounters as sexually neutral such as falling back into the kinship idiom that labels unrelated women as sister or aunt, and males as brother or uncle with explicit overtones of asexuality. In any event, Muslim women seem to have the ability to act as professionals whose habits of behavior do not require persistent orientation to men as males (Feldman, 2001).

In sex-segregated societies, women’s parallel networks of sociability are highly articulated and involve structured visiting patterns, specific forms of religious ritual participation; as well as specified forms of group entertainment, such as singing, dancing, and joking. The same is of course true about male groups and friendships (D. Kandiyoti & A. Kandiyoti, 1987).

Women’s greater ability to foster and maintain their own networks of sociability in the Middle East appears as an extremely important element in their control over their lives. One of the consequences of this social embeddedness of women is their ability to benefit from wider support systems for their domestic duties, especially childcare. These support systems may be of a reciprocal nature (especially among kin) but are just as frequently exploitative of other women (as with domestic servants or poor relatives). It may seem ironic that these are the very mechanisms that serve to shelter the male role from any fundamental redefinition, as domestic tasks continue to be effectively absorbed
by other women, even when wives lead demanding professional lives (D. Kandiyoti & A. Kandiyoti, 1987).

An examination of women’s life cycles will help to put in place an important building block of their identity, as well as shed some light on the psychological mechanisms instrumental in reproducing women’s subordination. In a classical patriarchy a girl comes to her husband’s patrilocally extended household. In her own socialization as a little girl, it is made quite clear that she will have to leave her house of origin to go to strangers. The cyclical nature of women’s relative power position in the household, as well as the fact that their, socialization, at every stage, is overseen by another woman whose authority she may covet, leads to a thorough internalization and reproduction of this particular form of patriarchy (D. Kandiyoti & A. Kandiyoti, 1987).

In this context, a woman’s relationship to her son is absolutely critical. The mother-son relationship is an intimate and affectionate one, where the woman indulges her son greatly and looks to him for future security and protection; as it is through her sons that a woman can achieve a position of power over her daughters-in-law, hence, a proclivity for son-preference (Cain; Khanam & Nahar, 1979; Dharmalingam & Morgan, 1996; D. Kandiyoti & A. Kandiyoti, 1987; Mason & Smith, 2000).

Women often do not command the use of their own labor, the family and community deciding for them where they should work and on what terms. The primary decision as to whether women are allowed to work outside the home frequently rests in the hands of dominant male members of the family or older women, for example,
mothers-in-law. This may remain true whether the woman is an agricultural laborer, a peasant, a factory worker or a school teacher (Z. Ahmad, 1984).

As regards women’s control over the fruits of their labor, several studies have shown that the earnings are by custom or tradition handed over to the male head of the household. In a study carried out in the Indian Punjab, it was reported that not a single woman said she could independently decide whether or not she would be available for work outside the home. All the women surveyed, including those who were primary earners in their families, clearly stated that they had no control over decisions regarding major expenditure incurred by the family or even over their own earnings (Z. Ahmad, 1984; Dixon, 1982).

The same phenomenon occurred in the case of plantation workers in Sri Lanka. It was frequently the men who collected the wages of the female family members, on the pretext that women worked later hours on the estate or had to attend to housework, whereas men finished earlier and had much more time to collect the pay. It is reported that women were seldom given the money to run their households or to meet their own needs. The rigid division of labor in domestic activities is such that it is the man who is in charge of the shopping. This becomes a natural and automatic justification for household income to remain in his hands. There is no indication that the woman has any real say in the way that her own earnings are spent (Z. Ahmad, 1984; Dixon 1982).

In the current modernizing environment, however, family extendedness accounts for a very short period of a household’s domestic cycle, and it may not take place at all. However, the break from the extended family structure does not seem to have a definitive
effect on women’s familial expectations. Women’s socialization as nurturing beings still continues. Adolescents and youngsters continue to depend on their families for shelter and material support, regardless of whether they are required to contribute to the family budget. Even after marriage, actual material constraints may make a period of cohabitation necessary. The birth of grandchildren brings new responsibilities and chores to the older woman at a time (D. Kandiyoti & A. Kandiyoti, 1987).

Now, the question arises; does the joint household act as a barrier to social change and hence women’s autonomy and independence. Conklin’s (1974, 1976) research substantiates that close contact with conservative kin in a joint household might not discourage a son from leaving home. Once a father (usually having a little education) reconciles himself to the fact that his sons want to leave the extended family home and move to a job in a different city; the joint family is a remarkably efficient institution for aiding its members in searching for a new house and a new job.

Conklin (1974, 1976) further argues that urban life does not leave all traditions unmodified; in the city, husbands and wives do treat each other much more as equals. The case he described involved a man who had obtained an excellent job offer outside the area of his extended family home on the provision that he migrate alone for at least a year. Normally, according to traditional role patterns in South Asian families, husbands and wives accept separation for long periods under such conditions. In this case, the man first accepted the job with great hopes. However, six years later, the man was still in the same place employed in his old job which was below his education and skills. The reason was simple. He was a convent-educated man and his wife was also literate and expected
her opinions to be honored. Although, the man’s father had told him to migrate to the new job, the wife’s opinion that, “If I can’t go, you won’t either” was honored. The traditional family ties had encouraged the move; the nuclear family roles prevented the change. Conklin’s (1974, 1976) research seems to suggest that it is not necessary to break off from the traditional joint household and form their own separate nuclear household for women to achieve autonomy; rather an extended family can prove to be quite functional in terms of economic and moral support. A woman can assert her rights and opinions if she is literate, and hence sentient of her rights within the household.

Ramu (1972) had come to the same conclusion in his research on rural to urban migration in South Asia. He postulates that despite geographic mobility and a long period of residence in the city, the migrants had sustained the patrilineal character of their kinship systems. But there is a slight modification in the residential pattern of the children of these migrants. The brides, after marriage entered the migrants’ extended family homes, but resided there only until their husbands made separate residential arrangements.

Ramu (1972) stresses that the new occupational status of the migrants had a decided impact on their kinship ties in terms of increased obligations to their parents and other kin, as the parents depend on their adult sons in their old age. Not all parents lived with their sons, however. If this is the case frequent monetary help may be extended to nonresident parents. However, the extent of the aid received is not substantial; as the adult sons living in large cities have limited earnings; often only restricted remittances are made.
The breakup of the joint family system signifies greater ramifications for the elderly than it does for the younger generation. Among the elderly, it is the women who suffer the most when family support is not there (Amin, 1998).

**Women’s Lack of Physical Mobility**

In patriarchal societies, women’s inability to move not only affects their employment opportunities, it also affects their training and educational opportunities. As a consequence, they are dependent on others, usually men, for establishing links with the outside world, with the result that men are able to exercise control over women’s lives and labor, and even to exploit them.

Because women, generally, bear family responsibilities (not only for children, but also for older family members); the employment they seek must be close to the home. The labor market for women is consequently limited; whether they are wage laborers, petty traders, seasonal workers or unpaid family workers; therefore their returns from labor are generally low. They are forced to accept the lower wages and/or profits available locally. Women’s role in reproduction (both biological and social) is, thus crucial in determining the sexual division of labor in production (Z. Ahmad, 1984; Dixon 1982; Moser & Peake, 1994).

This inability to move in search of better-paid employment affects all poor women, although it varies in degrees from country to country. It also affects their training opportunities. In the Comilla rural development project in Bangladesh, for instance, women experienced considerable difficulty in obtaining permission to travel to a government training center. In countries where strict seclusion is practiced, women are
virtually imprisoned in their compounds from puberty onwards, irrespective of their need to earn a living for themselves and their families. The women, covered by a recent village study in the Indian Punjab, were found to lead extremely restricted lives; and could not even visit their parents without the permission of their husbands and/or the latter’s family. This seclusion or near seclusion, which is by no means confined to Muslim women, has a direct bearing on women’s access to the outside world of employment, income-generating activities and participation in organizations such as trade unions and community planning and decision-making bodies (Z. Ahmad, 1984).

The result of these constraints on women’s freedom of movement is twofold: first they are unable to shop around for the better-paid jobs, being forced to take those available closer to home, whatever the terms and conditions; second, they are dependent on others, usually men, for establishing links with the outside world; with the result that men are able to exercise control over women’s lives and labor, for instance, collecting payment, selling produce, purchasing inputs and obtaining wage employment for them (Z. Ahmad, 1984; Dixon, 1982; Moser & Peake, 1994).

**Patriarchal Bargaining**

Those forms of strategizing that women undertake when living within a set of tangible constraints have been defined by Kandiyoti (1988) as, *patriarchal bargains*. Such strategizing varies over time and according to caste, class, and ethnicity. Most important, these patriarchal bargains wield a potent influence on women’s gendered subjectivity and determine the nature of gender ideology in different contexts.
In their study of Iranian women’s negotiation with patriarchy, Gerami and Lehnerer (2001) and Tohidi, (2003) explain that for women from lower middle class, seeking a higher education and employment was perceived as undermining their traditional bargain with patriarchy. Consequently, if these women sought to expand their sex roles, it had to be within the parameters of that particular bargain. The Islamic revolution offered such a possibility, giving them spatial mobility and control over others. Some women served the revolutionary cause by sewing uniforms and making provisions for soldiers. More importantly, they kept an eye on their neighbors. Some women, taking similar approach chose to enter the public arena through paid labor. When employed, they helped enforce hijab (veil) and participated in the purging of women workers. Their loyalty to the regime often led to their being promoted over senior staff.

For Shi’a women in Peshawar, Pakistan, attachments to family and religion were so critical and profound that they were not prepared to pursue social status, self-assertion, career, competence, or distinction through means considered illegitimate by religious teachings and cultural understandings about family. The Shi’a women were not prepared to reject the patriarchal bargain to exchange autonomy for support and protection. Rather they appropriated the authorized majeles (a religious ritual of mourning), framing their ritual performances with their own interests. Majeles is a religiously and culturally legitimized form of ritual mourning where women chant mourning songs. Thus, women’s majeles provided a safe arena for women to form a sense of self and identity through organized competition with women from other majeles groups. Hence, they were able to
achieve mobility and a specific sense of independence and at the same time managed not to challenge the existing sociocultural traditions (Hegland, 1998).

Patriarchy is a complex, conditional, and contradictory social institution. Women under diverse social, cultural, and legislative constraints negotiate access to autonomy in ways that are suited to their own particular circumstances. Feldman’s (2001) research with Muslim women in Bangladesh revealed that these women had deployed Islamic traditions embedded within normative expectations of secular law and social rights to negotiate access to and control of the factory floor in a garment factory. For example, workers displayed expressions of respectability, such as those authored in Quranic interpretations of appropriate modesty and dress, and used idioms of kinship and generation – bhai [older brother] or chacha [uncle] to refer to male coworkers and apa or didi [elder sister] to refer to senior female workers - as a way to redefine their relationship to nonfamilial male workers, and to establish a sense of connectedness to the female workers. This desexualization of workplace relations familiarizes and privatizes relations between men and women and redefines appropriate persons with whom one can interact. For parents too, invoking the idiom of kinship and referring to the employer as chacha rationalizes entrusting their daughters to a male outsider, allowing them simultaneously, to benefit from their daughters’ employment outside the home. By recasting strangers as kin, workers and families mediate the contradictory ways in which Islamic prescriptions and practices confront the need or desire for employment. In so doing, they contest both Islamic discourses that constrain women and discourses about modern, immodest women who work outside the home.
**Purdah**

Based on gradations in ritual purity and expressed in systems of occupational specialization, residential segregation, marital endogamy, special religious observances, family name, manner of dress, stratification by caste, and class, *purdah* (female veiling and segregation) permeates not only Muslim culture but Hindu, Buddhist, and tribal cultures as well. Purdah serves as a mark of upper class and caste status, as well as affluence. Purdah cannot be homogeneously interpreted as subjugating women. There are practical reasons for women to wear *burka* or veil, such as the opportunity to work outside the home (Z. Ahmed, 1984; Feldman, 2001; Kandiyoti, 1988).

Feldman (2001) posits that research on women’s contributions to formal economy often sustains the view that the contributions correspond to the institutionalization of purdah. Not surprisingly, cross national and class-class compositions presume that covering a woman’s body, as in wearing a burka or veil, may be interpreted in similar ways across time, place, and among diverse groups of women, to signify female modesty and decorum as well as women’s subjugation. This homogenization disempowers women by ignoring the varied meanings that the burka may hold and by disregarding how they construct or contest power struggles that center on veiling. As Z. Ahmed (1984) so effectively argues, there are practical reasons for adopting Islamic dress: to affirm religious and social customs, to save the cost of acquiring expensive and fashionable clothes, and to protect oneself from harassment, as women who wear burka can talk and meet men in social spaces without the fear of being dubbed immoral. These are strategic
choices that women make to redefine public space, in ways that accommodate their needs.

Poor women who cannot afford the cost of burka offer other interpretations of how they keep purdah: purdah is inside; purdah is in one’s mind. Women garment workers articulate the meaning of purdah and the wearing of the burka in a similar expression by distinguishing between authentic moralities as appropriate deportment, whether or not one wears a burka (Feldman, 2001; Papanec, 1971).

Bodman and Tohidi (1998) echo Feldman’s (2001) and Papanec’s (1971) sentiments when they contend that hijab may carry several diffuse meanings. For example, putting on a hijab may be a way of participating in a sphere of solidarity or may imply membership in a moral community of Muslims sharing a broadly defined cultural legacy. It may mean a rejection of the modern or Western world because that world has been found morally corrupt or wanting in some other aspects. It may be a way of finding a safe place in a man’s space by tracing clear sexual boundaries that men are not to cross or a shield under which women take on daring social roles. Or still, the hijab may be imposed by male relatives who want to participate in the political symbolism of militant Islamism. A female university student in Tunisia, Bodman and Tohidi (1998) cite, wore hijab because she got along better with her father. He trusted her more. Since, she started wearing the hijab, the endless fights between father and daughter about the daughter’s whereabouts had come to an end.

Other women wear hijab as a form of protection. Bodman and Tohidi (1998) refer to some examples from their research in Egypt. A woman lawyer stated that when she
wore a hijab, men in the street left her alone. She could go out and do what she had to do more comfortably. The hijab gave a message to men. It told them that a woman was not sexually available. And a produce attendant in a poor neighborhood declared that to be on good terms with customers and because she did not want to be bothered by anyone, she wore a hijab. Finally, a woman who had a college degree and worked as an administrator indicated that she made the choice to wear a hijab on her own. She said that her choice was dictated by her conviction that she belonged to a great and beautiful civilization with deep roots and a set of norms. It was those set of norms that she had adopted. The passions and struggles over cultural identification generate a delicate situation in which women have to negotiate their own identity. Many women have refined hijab in ways that fit their own purposes, thus generating new cultural meanings that reflect the diversity prevalent in individual behavior under the umbrella of Islam.

Some women workers in Bangladesh made statements that seemingly appear contradictory. On the one hand, women welcomed the newfound mobility and freedom that accompanied work and their choice not to exhibit their observance of purdah. On the other hand women workers also sought a future when they could choose not to work and may be even to wear the burka. Feldman (2001); Tohidi (2003) and Papanek (1971) argue that the issue here is not that women desired no choice in decisions about veiling; rather they desired greater choice in decisions whether or not to work. Moreover, for these women, veiling was not a symbol of the appropriateness of their behavior in maintaining family honor but was an expression of their husband’s and families’ ability
to provide completely for their subsistence (Dixon, 1982; Feldman, 2001; Papanek, 1971; Tohidi, 2003).

Kandiyoti (1988) explains this quite well with an example from the government of Khomeini, in Iran. She writes that Khomeini’s efforts to keep women at home found enthusiastic support among many Iranian women despite the obvious elements of repression. The implicit promise of male responsibility restores the integrity of their original patriarchal system in an environment where the range of options available to women is extremely restricted.

According to Kandiyoti (1988) wearing the veil or seeking to return to their homestead may reflect women’s retreat into conservatism as a way of holding men accountable or how women participate in a patriarchal bargain. As material changes undermine home-based subsistence they generate conditions that require individual responsibility for survival; they reconfigure the meaning of the family wage to reveal the increasing dependence upon women to meet their own survival needs. In the context of chronic impoverishment, the normative contract that assumes male responsibility and the symbolic practices that sustain it break down; transforming the context and conditions of the patriarchal bargain in ways that challenge extant sources of legitimate male authority.

Feudalism is a crucial element of the rural populations in southern Punjab, as well as some other rural areas, therefore, it was included in the section which explained the background for women’s current educational and emancipation status in Pakistan. But as my study was done in northern Punjab where feudalism is not a predominant feature of
the rural regions; hence, it is not included in this section of current educational and emancipation status of women.

**Market: Impact on Women’s Literacy and Emancipation**

Increasingly, salaried income – an outcome of industrial revolution – has come to be the evaluative measure of the individual. While both wage-earning and the evaluative measure of wage-earning are increasingly extended to the female, the delegation of the tasks heretofore exclusively performed by her as primary care-taker who was not obligated to work outside of the familial home environment has gone unchanged. Instead, she suffers from a double burden (Wadud, 2006).

Studies from several countries confirm that rural women participate extensively in agricultural work, either in the field or within the confines of the compound of their home, depending on the degree of their seclusion. Even in countries like Bangladesh and Pakistan, where because of tradition and purdah, women generally do not work in the fields; they are, nevertheless, fully occupied in agricultural processes once the crops have been brought in the compound. Their work consists of threshing to separate rice or wheat from the stalks, drying the stalks for cattle feed, winnowing and sieving the rice or wheat several times, and finally preparing for the storage of the crops, which might include the making of special containers from a mixture of cow dung and mud. Additionally, women have to do most of the work involved in the production of poultry, goats, milk, lentils and vegetables (Z. Ahmad, 1984).

When households have to reduce food consumption, as a result of unemployment and reduced incomes, women and girls have been witnessed consuming less food than
men and boys. Similarly, when user charges are introduced or increased for education and healthcare, the access of women and the girl child to these services is affected. South Asian women’s involvement with the market has been under conditions of low growth with low social development. Here most of the economies are dominated by the agricultural sector where growth rate is relatively low, but incidence of rural poverty and landlessness high. Pressures are created for people to move into the non-agricultural sector: into urban squatter settlements and pavement living. Side by side with massive rural poverty is growing urban poverty. The major technological changes introduced into the agricultural sector to create growth have resulted in productivity increases in food production and changes in employment patterns. With increased production, the demand for both male and female laborers and casual workers has increased. But their real wages have not. Increase in employment opportunities at this level does not imply an increase in the standard of living. The women have almost no access to new technologies, skills and opportunities (Heyzer & Sen, 1994; Moser & Peake, 1994).

For many women structural adjustment programs mean longer hours of work, paid or unpaid; maintaining households on reduced resources and spending more time in terms of looking for cheap goods; setting up informal support networks, etc. What is regarded as increased efficiency is often the transfer of cost from the paid economy to the unpaid work of women within the household (the unpaid economy) as seen in the cost of caring for the young, the elderly, and the sick (Heyzer & Sen, 1994).

Heyzer and Sen (1994) explain that with new opportunities and greater mobility, men are moving away from the farms and many women are taking on the major
responsibility of the household agricultural system. Women’s work burden has increased. Young daughters drop out of school to help their mothers and the consequence is high female illiteracy. The formation of village enterprises and private companies has provided new opportunities for women, especially those with education. Those without education or skills required by the new society suffer doubly: from exclusion from new opportunities and from the cut-backs from the former protective systems of social security. This has led to new patterns of impoverishment and the emergence of some street women and children working as beggars.

Women’s Access to Land and Other Resources

In many parts of the developing world, women seldom hold rights to land in their own name. Even in families with substantial landed property, the status of women is similar in many ways to that of the landless poor; since in the final analysis, they have no direct control over the major productive resources. Their situation becomes critical when they are widowed or divorced and their needs correspondingly are more acute. It is particularly serious where divorce is easy for men, where polygamy is strictly a male privilege and the presence of a second wife reduces the amount of land or income allocated to the first. But the problem affects not only widowed, divorced or abandoned and single women; it also concerns those, whose husbands and other male family members have migrated to the city in search of cash employment. In their absence, women may be required to manage the farm, but often they are left only with user rights as wives of migrants, but no ownership rights (Z. Ahmad, 1984).
The effect of this limited access to land rights is that women are dependent on men for income and status in the community. Since availability of credit, other services and improved inputs generally are directly linked to access to land, women are faced with a whole range of handicaps in fulfilling their role as producers (Z. Ahmad, 1984).

The circumstances under which erosion of rights to land has occurred are not the same for all countries and regions. For instance, the legal rights of rural women, in India, have been eroded because of ignorance of these rights on the part of women and even of state officials. In Pakistan, women’s rights of inheritance and landownership are specified in Islam (albeit only half those of men), in reality these rights have been eroded partly as a direct consequence of poverty and land fragmentation and partly as a direct result of the seclusion of women. The necessity for male spokesmen to represent them in public, which is a corollary of female seclusion, diminishes the effective control women have over the management and disposal of property that is otherwise rightfully their own (Z. Ahmad, 1984; Dixon, 1982).

The situation becomes especially critical when men migrate out in search of cash employment, leaving their wives behind to manage the farms and sustain the family. Sometimes a man might even start a new second family, in the city, and return to the village with them to resume control of the homestead, evicting the first wife and her children (Z. Ahmad, 1984).

Bangladeshi women have become the subjects of several national success stories. The members of the Grameen Bank, the workers in the garment industry, and the women who helped to dramatically reduce the population growth rate all have been lauded for
their contribution to the national project. Nevertheless, for most Bangladeshi women and men, the situation remains bleak. Despite its exclusion from the formal wage market, until recently women’s farm labor was central to agricultural production, particularly, in post-harvest processing. Working in their own homestead or those of more prosperous neighbors, women from poor and middle-income families were able to contribute to household income while maintaining some level of purdah. Increasing landlessness, male unemployment, and the mechanization of agricultural processes have significantly altered the lives of most rural women (Bodman & Tohidi, 1998).

**Women and Urban Migration**

Many women have been forced to migrate to urban areas, often by themselves, in search of employment. The encroachment of these women on previously male social and economic spaces has generated widespread anxiety. By their very visibility, these women articulate both fears of unregulated sexuality and the threat of the usurpation of male economic roles. Women migrants to the cities frequently seek work in garment manufacturing, the showcase of export-oriented industrialization in Bangladesh. In many ways, the lifestyle of garment workers breaches the limits of respectability. The young women often live alone, that is, without a male guardian, in slums or in women’s hostels. They are forced to work until very late at night, sometimes all night, to complete factory orders. On both counts, their respectability is thrown into question. Moreover, many have developed highly visible, modern consumer habits; such as wearing makeup, shopping as a past time, and going to the cinema and the park for their recreation. Thus their presence is marked even in their leisure time. The presence of young girls and women commuting
to work has certainly shifted the tenor of urban public spaces that were mostly male-dominated (Bodman & Tohidi, 1998).

Their high profile occupation renders garment workers permanently and peculiarly anomalous, for these garment girls call into question their respectability, but also highlights the new social order configured by globalization and the feminization of labor. In an economic context that marginalizes male labor. This might be an explanation for the virulence of the hostility, mainly verbal, to which most garment workers are subjected in public places (Bodman & Tohidi, 1998).

The social impact of rising poverty and inequality in Bangladesh, since independence, can be gauged by the growing incidence of trafficking, prostitution, and dowry-demands. Violence against women has taken new and disturbing forms, such as acid throwing, abductions, and dowry deaths (Bodman & Tohidi, 1998).

State Intervention: Impact on Women’s Literacy and Emancipation

In the face of all odds, nevertheless, in some developing countries, increasing access to education among women can be observed. The question is what are the reasons behind this change? Stromquist (1990) offers three reasons. The first has to do with changes in technology which have rendered industrial and service work less dependent on physical strength, hence the increasing incorporation of women to acquire greater levels of education in order to increase their competitiveness vis-a-vis others in the labor pool. In fact because of the existing ideologies about women’s inferiority, women would have to obtain more education and competence than men in order to compete on equal footing.
It is not necessary, though, that greater participation of women in the labor force would take place under conditions of sexual equality. Stromquist (1990) and Ross (1999) very effectively argue that economic forces would use the state to regulate gender relations to their satisfaction: the tie between gender and state would continue but under new forms made necessary by the new technologies.

The second reason that Stromquist (1990) puts forth is derived from the popular belief that education serves to increase social and economic mobility. Equality is becoming an increasingly explicit norm in national official statements of education. According to Ross (1999) and Stromquist (1990), given the strength and wide diffusion of these norms, the state today in most countries would find it very difficult to discriminate openly against women.

A third reason that Stromquist (1990) points out for the state’s willingness to permit the incorporation of greater numbers of women in the educational system has to do with the content of schooling. The school system does not offer knowledge that challenges the sexual division of labor or gender ideologies. Ross (1999) and Stromquist (1990) argue that: (a) many school textbooks in developing countries contain negative messages for female identity; (b) often teachers consciously or unconsciously discriminate in favor of boys; and (c) the school experience affects the career aspirations of boys but leaves unmodified the aspirations of girls. In very few instances has the state taken steps to remove sexual stereotypes from textbooks. Little training has occurred to provide teachers with new strategies to combat gender discrimination in teaching practices. Few measures have been taken to modify organizational structures and
occupational patterns that persistently place women in low positions in school settings. This being the case, the expansion of schooling does not have to be equated with the questioning of gender ideologies. Hence, the state can engage in the expansion of women’s schooling as a relatively harmless extension of human rights.

The typical poverty alleviation program, in most South Asian countries falls within the soft sector of the national plan. This program is the first to suffer when there are cuts in the national budget funding, as programs such as poverty alleviation are seen as unproductive (Heyzer & Sen, 1994; Moser & Peake, 1994).

The state plans as though men support families, when in reality it is men together with women who do so, and frequently it is women who do so alone. Moreover, the state plans at the level of the households; rather than household members, it is assumed that men as heads of the household and community leaders are able to speak for women, i.e., they understand women’s experiences and needs and are willing and able to communicate them. Besides, in the low income households, not working symbolizes a higher social status for women which they aspire to attain. Often, for this reason, women are not reported as working even though they are productively occupied (Heyzer & Sen, 1994; Moser & Peake, 1994).

To understand state-led development in Asia, it is important to look at the origins of macro planning and anti-poverty projects and how issues affecting women are addressed within them. A typical plan involves a definition of objectives, followed by resource allocation and mobilization across sectors. A plan often has hard and soft sectors, the former considered the core productive sectors of the economy, while the
latter often include the social development sectors, special areas and group programs, the programs with so-called social objectives, and poverty alleviation. The two sectors differ from each other in a number of ways, such as the share in total resources, the way targets are set and the form of evaluation and accountability. Although, this is by no means similar across countries, the soft sectors receive a much lower share of total resources; their accountability is weak and this is compounded by the setting of financial rather than physical targets. The typical poverty alleviation program falls within the soft sector of the plan. It suffers from the above-mentioned problems and from the consequent attitudes of planners who come to view such programs as unproductive (Cain; Khanam & Nahar, 1979).

How do women fit into this picture? Women have entered these programs in two ways: one, as a minor sector – a section, a bureau, a department within a ministry – with a small share in resources; and two, as a special group in poverty programs. While this is, without doubt, an important beginning; the bulk of the resources are allocated, in most, but not all countries of the region, to hard sectors of the plan (Heyzer & Sen, 1994; Moser & Peake, 1994).

In so far as the broad approach to planning is concerned, two assumptions shape planners’ attitudes: first, there is a significant trade-off between the productive and the soft sectors, and second, that the sectoral approach is the only possible way of planning. What is not sufficiently realized is that for the large section of the population below the poverty line, and this includes a substantial number of women in the Asian region, the trade-off has no real meaning. Women are generally by-passed by increases in production
in many cases, but tend to bear the brunt of cuts in the so-called soft sector of the plan. For them poverty-alleviation can come only through increases in their production and productivity. Therefore, if there is a trade-off, it is not so much between production and poverty-alleviation in the abstract, but between those who benefit when the former is stressed versus those whose interests lie in the latter at the level of resource allocation (Heyzer & Sen, 1994; Moser & Peake, 1994).

Insufficient attention has been paid to the possibility of combining area planning with sectoral planning. Both axioms: the trade-off between the productive and the soft sectors and the sectoral approach to planning need to be challenged, if anti-poverty programs are to be made more meaningful. A gender-sensitive approach to the problem of poverty requires a questioning of the basic adage underlying the planning process itself. Studies have revealed that simple integration of women into the existing structures and institutions of their society through the planning and implementation process will not necessarily lead to their emancipation. In fact, in many cases, the integration of women into development leads to a worsening of women’s situation. This is exacerbated by stereotypes and untested assumptions made by state planners (Heyzer & Sen, 1994).

The most common stereotype about women in state-led development is based on the social responsibilities of men and women. The state plans as though men support families when in reality it is men together with women who do so, and frequently it is women who do so alone. The fact is that as most male wage-laborers are paid subsistence wages, women in male-headed households are compelled to work, as well (Heyzer & Sen, 1994; Moser & Peake, 1994).
The use of household rather than household members as the preferred unit of analysis can create potential policy risk. This is because emphasis on the household tends to ignore the economic and social behavior that occurs both within and without the household. Whether planners like it or not, there are gender differences in intra-household allocation of production and consumption. The existence of gender complexities in the handling of income affects the quality of family life, the quality of nutrition of children, their education and employment, and household stability. Emphasis on the household as the unit for planning ignores the possibility of conflict between members and cannot pick up the differences in the interests of those women who are less articulate (Heyzer & Sen, 1994).

A closely related problem deals with the concept of work. In the analysis of work and its rewards, sharp distinctions are made between domestic and non-domestic spheres. Yet for many groups of women, the boundaries of the two spheres are not so clearly defined. For women in the sub-subsistence and non-monetized sectors of society, the domestic and non-domestic spheres exist as a single system. For this reason women’s economic roles have been invisible (Heyzer & Sen, 1994; Moser & Peake, 1994).

When development resources and benefits are channeled through men, as heads of households; it is assumed that all family members benefit equally. It is also assumed that men are able to speak for women, i.e., they understand women’s experiences and needs and are willing and able to communicate them. The existence of female-headed households, women-maintained households, single parent households, and various forms of extended households is overlooked, even when these constitute close to or over the
majority of households. Many of these stereotypes are manifested in state policies and programs and they guide decisions regarding the allocation of resources in ways that mold material realities at the micro level and gender relations (Heyzer & Sen, 1994).

It would be appropriate here to point out that until very recently issues relating to the urban areas, urbanization, and urban poverty were not considered particularly important for developing countries. This is because a greater proportion of the population in developing countries lived in rural areas; development strategies, therefore centered on rural areas which also claimed a bulk of development investments. The last two to three decades, however, have changed the rural-urban composition of population; with the urban population registering extraordinarily high growth (Heyzer & Sen, 1994).

Heyzer and Sen (1994) pose the question: what do women do and what can women do to reduce poverty? This question has been posed in the context of India which not only has a large urban population but an expanding base. The researchers present a case study done in Faridabad, India. They define poverty as lack of access – access by women to employment and income generating activities; and to those basic facilities and services and factors of development and consumption which contribute to improvement in the quality of life; and the degree to which women are able to make decisions or participate in the process of decision-making, particularly with respect to entering the labor market.

Spurred by an expansion of the manufacturing sector and proximity to the national capital, Faridabad’s population growth has been extraordinary. The pace with which the city has grown has led to an all-round proliferation of slum settlements. In
these settlements only about five percent of the females had secured access to the labor market. Most were engaged in low-end jobs and activities, such as sweepers, construction workers, domestic servants, shopkeepers, tailors’ helpers, and paper bag makers, etc. (Heyzer & Sen, 1994).

Even though the earnings of the women were low, they were important to the total household incomes. Women’s main aim was to earn for the survival of their households and families. Those households that were female-headed were poorest of the poor in the sampled households. Fifty nine percent of female workers contributed between 26-50 percent of the total household incomes and were thus able to push household incomes above poverty line (Heyzer & Sen, 1994).

Women have lower propensity to work if men’s incomes are stable and regular. In the low income households, not working symbolizes a higher social status for women which they aspire to attain. (Often, for this reason, women are not reported as working even though they are productively occupied (Heyzer & Sen, 1994).

Heyzer and Sen (1994) also cite that there is disparity in the levels of wages and earnings between males and females, even when women are engaged in similar activities and work the same hours as men (Heyzer & Sen, 1994).

Field level evidence on the process of decision-making, Heyzer and Sen (1994) contend is extremely fuzzy, and it is far from clear if working women have greater control on major decisions as compared to others, and if they have, how they exercise such control. Decisions are linked not only to the economic power wielded by women, but also to factors such as their employment status. Thus, the wage employees and those
engaged in piece-rate activities have greater leverage on how to spend their incomes as compared to self-employed women or those who work jointly, in family enterprises.

**Religion**

It is tempting to reduce all the constraints that women in Muslim regions of the world experience to patriarchal Islam. A close scrutiny of the historical and cultural forces that give rise to the particularities of gender relations in given locales, can verify that Islam, on its own is not repressive of women.

In many Muslim societies, gender dimension of modernization remains particularly uneven and contradictory with respect to family law and intra-family dynamics. Women have earned (or been granted) some formal aspects of emancipation such as the right to vote, the right to public education, employment, and ownership, the occasional presence of women political leaders (for example, in Pakistan, Turkey, Bangladesh and Indonesia), and artistic and cultural creativity testify to women’s agency and dynamism in the Muslim world. But the unequal and patriarchal nature of family law and control over women’s bodies and sexuality has kept women at the mercy of men, denying women social adulthood (complete citizenship) and autonomy (Tohidi, 2003).

The tenacity of patriarchal family codes has been attributed in part to the patriarchal bias in the *sharia* (Islamic law) and in part to the prevalence of a sense of insecurity and emasculation among many men, as a result of economic and political disempowerment under the impact of authoritarian modernization and globalization. Control over women and children within the family remains the last bastion of assertion of masculinity and power. The seemingly modern state-elite, having little interest in
changing family law, can actually use it as an implicit bargaining chip to buy loyalty from the conservative clergy and to limit resentment and anti-state sentiments from classes of disempowered and traditional men (Tohidi, 2003).

Islam as an ideological system does provide some unifying concepts that influence women’s experiences of subordination. These are vested in the culturally defined modes of control of female sexuality, especially insofar as they influence subjective experiences of womanhood and femininity. However, there is a great deal of diversity and specificity in women’s experiences in Islamic societies which vary with the national/ethnic histories and social policies of the countries within which women are located. Within the general and specific sphere of women’s experiences, Kandiyoti (1987) and Tohidi (2003) cite the experiences of women in Turkey. They explain that among the countries of the Middle East, Turkey may be singled out as a republic that has addressed the question of women’s emancipation early, explicitly, and extensively. Women’s rights were not obtained through the activities of women’s movement, as in the case of Western women’s struggle for suffrage, but were granted by the government of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, committed to the goals of modernization and Westernization.

Kandiyoti (1987) and Tohidi (2003) further illustrate that this kind of approach (a government conferring rights to women) corresponds with analyses of women’s rights in other kinds of revolutionary activities. An analysis of the mobilization of Muslim women of Soviet Central Asia illustrates a different but equally pragmatic political project. The key to improving the position of women in socialist societies may be seen as reforming governments in order to dismantle the old order. In this respect, Kandiyoti (1987) points
out that the most striking differences may be found in the capitalist and socialist states in Muslim societies of the Third World. In the former, traditional practices such as polygamy, veiling, child marriage, and the seclusion of women from public life seem to prevail to a much greater extent. This brings leads to the rather obvious conclusion that the Islamic nature of a society can only be evaluated with reference to the broader political and historical environment of the region.

Historically speaking women’s subordination has not been peculiar to the Islamic world. Evidence from as early as the Assyrian legal text of the thirteenth century BC, indicates that seclusion and veiling was practiced in pre-Islamic Iran (Persia), in the Byzantine Empire, and in the Greco-Roman world. Veiling was also (and sometimes still is) a sign of status and class. For example, a respectable Athenian woman was usually secluded and veiled to signal that she is protected from sexual advances and that she is not so poor as to need to go out to work or even to shop. In terms of guarding women from outside males, endogamy, cousin marriage, emphasis on female virginity, and chastity, and customs relating to honor and honor killings, other Mediterranean people had much in common with the Muslims. These behavioral patterns have been attributed to the topography of the region, the difficult terrain, mixed settlement, and the prevalence of tribal groups, the effects of which seeped into their culture over centuries. This indicates that Islam (like any other religion) is not a monolithic, ahistoric and pre-social entity, but operates in a socio-historic context through interplay or interaction with local customs, socio-economics and politics of any given time (Tohidi, 2003).
It is tempting for scholars and for feminist scholars in the West, in particular, to reduce all the constraints that women in Muslim regions of the world experience to patriarchal Islam. With a few exceptions, gender inequality is attributed to Islam’s presumed influence upon the lives of women and men in North Africa, the Middle East, and South and South East Asia. The unstated assumption is that religion is at once the cause and the solution to gender inequality. By attending closely to the historical and cultural forces that give rise to the particularities of gender relations in given locales, it is possible to move beyond reductive accounts of women and Islam. Specific historical configurations of gender and religion simultaneously emerge from and facilitate political and economic competition, colonial and post-colonial intervention, and ethnic nationalism (Bodman & Tohidi, 1998).

Non-Formal Education and NGOs:

Possibilities for Lower SES Women in Developing Countries

NFE is a viable option for rural and urban poor and, especially, women in developing countries; the reason being its flexibility and cost-effectiveness, as well as a low threat level to the patriarchal system that women, in most of the developing countries have to encounter. Moreover, the NFE projects designed for women need to specifically address the subject-matter of women’s oppression, along with the other critical factor – that of training for income generation projects, as both these issues, women feel are crucial to their empowerment (N. Ahmed, 2000).

Non-formal education can offer many advantages in meeting the learning needs of the people in developing countries, especially rural and urban poor and women. The
flexibility in content, timing, methods, and location of nonformal education makes possible more effective ways of meeting the immediate learning needs of students and facilitates the integration of what is learned into the daily lives of the participants. Eade, (2000) and Evans (1981) posit that the largest proportion of the population of developing countries lives in the rural areas, ranging from 60 to 96 percent, according to the World Bank data. Primary enrollment rates show very large disparities in who is being served by the single general educational system in the poorer countries. Girls and the rural and the urban poor are the most underserved. Non-formal education with its flexibility can serve these populations in ways that formal education cannot.

EFA (2007) states its goals for adult education as:

Goal 3: Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programs. Goal 4: Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults. (p. 19)

The EFA Report (2007) further adds that,

Despite overall progress, significant disparities between adult men and women remain in some countries. Gender disparities favoring men are especially prevalent in West and Central Africa; in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan, among countries of South and West Asia; and in Morocco and Yemen among the Arab States. In all these cases the female literacy rate is less than two-thirds of the male rate. (pp. 40-41)
Essentially, welfare-oriented projects which are quite separate from the rural and urban development and special projects for women exist in practically every country, often encouraged by foreign aid and sponsored by governments and by non-official bodies. These projects, however, often suffer from serious failings. They are frequently planned from above, with little or no grass-roots involvement, and are formulated around the myth that women are principally housewives, ignoring the fact that the large majority participate extensively in production. Moreover, many of them are handicraft projects; designed to train women who are normally engaged in working in the fields or wage-earning jobs in the urban areas; to produce embroidered goods, which are often un-saleable (M. Ahmed, 1982).

**NGO Project Design: Supports and Constraints**

Researchers feel that programs for women’s literacy must balance that which women seek with that which women need. In developing countries, most women, because of their poverty are more interested in learning skills for income generation than for literacy and gender consciousness. However, literacy programs must go beyond nutrition, health, and family planning and move into consciousness-raising and mobilization. The content of literacy programs should address local realities, to show how these realities have been distorted and modified. Women also need skills that will allow them to earn more money; address survival needs better, and gain enough autonomy to make decisions about issues that concern their selves and their incomes (Arts; Noortman & Reinalda, 2001; Stromquist, 1990).
Ross (1996, 1999) stresses two questions – what will education do for women? And what will women do with education? - are crucial when designing programs for women’s education. Kelly (1999) contends that women’s education is greatly affected by the opportunities for women to obtain gainful employment. Studies in Burkina Faso for example, showed that women, once their time was freed from the drudgery of household tasks by well-digging and other small scale technologies, did not attend classes or send their daughters to school, because they saw education as unrelated to income generation. Dixon (1982) argues that if one of the goals of employment-generating schemes is to reduce inequalities between rural and urban areas and across socioeconomic groups, then rural women, in households with little or no control over land in South Asia become natural clients for these programs. Furthermore, if employment-generating schemes are to create conditions under which groups can work together, to achieve collective economic and political goals, then the question becomes one of identifying indigenous sources of solidarity and trust on which collective action can be based.

**Participatory Techniques**

In order to achieve empowerment and improvements in the lives of women and girls from their perspective, participatory techniques are applied to gather information regarding their lives, needs and potential. Many projects now go beyond seeing participation as merely consulting women on their problems. Ways are being found to ensure their full participation in the final analysis in order to record their problems from their perspective (Afshar, 1998; Coombs, 1976).
An example is the GRAAP technique (developed by the Groupe de Rochere et d’Appui pour l’Autopromotion Paysanne in Burkina Faso), used by many projects in Francophone Africa. Its emphasis on the use of sub-group sessions for different groups within a community is particularly useful. A sub-group of women only has been found to be more likely to elicit active participation in giving opinions by women and in certain contexts more so, if the group is once again divided into older and younger women. The sub-groups are also used to avoid the domination of discussions by women elites (Afshar, 1998; Dixon, 1982).

Shared economic need, i.e., shared class status thus forms a complementary basis for collective action, such as organizing producers’ cooperatives. Self-interest seems to be the most binding force, therefore there is more democracy within such institutions which are bound by common interests, common caste and class and economic background (Arts; Noortman & Reinalda, 2001; Dixon, 1982).

Organizers from the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) also reported that women are more effectively mobilized for joint economic ventures, such as growing vegetables, raising poultry, or making fishnets when they come from similar class backgrounds, for example, wives of fisherman, or wives of landless agricultural laborers, than from stratified communities. The focus on shared class identities ideally encourages self-reliance and motivates members to exert collective pressure on wealthier sectors of the community for a larger share of material and social resources. This type of collective action is likely to be undermined if the group is pervaded by vertical
alignments in which one class of members is economically and socially dependent on another (Dixon, 1982).

**Vertical Alliances**

The issue of dependence of some members on others raises the question of the role of patronage and factionalism in organizing and managing joint economic ventures, among women. Both class and primal traditions are probably of limited value in explaining the nature and dynamics of social and political groupings in South Asian agrarian societies. For a fuller understanding, one must move into the realm of informal power groups, leadership-centered cliques and factions, and whole panoply of more or less instrumental ties that cut across caste and class lines to form vertical alliances or personal following. The landowner’s wife can exert extensive independent power in the provision of rights to women of dependent client families who service the household (Dixon, 1982).

Patron-client relations are of course, pervasive among agrarian populations in South Asia. Typified by the institution of agricultural tenancy in which the landowner-patron provides material resources (the use of land, equipment, money) and social resources (prestige and protection) to a tenant in exchange for the tenant’s (and his family’s) labor, personal services, obedience, loyalty, and political support (Dixon, 1982).

Wives and daughters in tenant and landless families may have special obligations to women in landowning families, such as helping with post-harvest activities, performing personal services, or preparing feasts for special occasions. Women, in a
Punjabi village, in Pakistan, for example are central to the exchange of gifts, services, and favors among households in patron-client associations, sometimes initiating new contracts between families. The landowner’s wife can also wield considerable independent power in the allocation of rights to women of dependent client families who service the household (Dixon, 1982).

In a search for natural bases of social organization on which to build cooperative economic enterprises for women, it would seem sensible to take advantage of these vertical alliances. The danger of incorporating elite women into the group is of course, that patterns of traditional exploitation and dependence will be continued in the new enterprise. In several, rural women’s jute handicraft cooperatives in Bangladesh, members elected the highest-status women of the village as their officers even if they did not trust the women to represent their interests. Low-status members apparently felt that they had no option, because their families depended on the elite for employment and other benefits. The elite women, in turn, sometimes refused to engage in actual production and felt free to keep the group’s handicrafts for their own use or give them to friends. Rather than protect the lower-status clients, the patrons used their position, within the cooperative to advance themselves socially and sometimes financially. The dependence of clients on their patrons and the tendency of patrons to manipulate the group, through favoritism acted as an impediment to the creation of a sense of solidarity and self-reliance among women workers (Arts; Noortman & Reinalda, 2001; Dixon, 1982).
NGO Project Sustainability: The Role of Participants

If traditional patterns are to be excluded, then how is the group to gain access to resources? In initial stages, the development agent (government extension worker, community association, cooperative organizer, individual activist) responsible for mobilizing the group will probably have to take on the role of patron, intervening on the group’s behalf with state agencies and private enterprises to obtain loans, credit, materials, permits, and so on. But if the change agent is not simply to perpetuate the old dependence in new clothing, selected members of the group will need to be trained to take on management responsibilities and establish support networks. When new village cooperatives are organized in the Amul Dairy Scheme, in Indian Gujrat, for example, persons selected for training as bookkeepers, quality-control technicians, and “barefoot” veterinarians are sent to older established cooperatives to learn from their skilled counterparts. As the network of cooperatives expands, training and production techniques can evolve into fairly simple, replicable models (Dixon, 1982).

In patrilineal, patrilocal societies; characteristic of most parts of rural South Asia, advancement of the economic and political interests of the patrilineage depends on unified action of its male members in the public sphere. It is possible, however, that women attach themselves less firmly than men to factions based on patrilineage. One reason, for this detachment could be that women’s attempts to maximize their individual gains; whether they be in education or employment, through influencing their husbands and sons frequently seem to conflict with the interests of men. Therefore, it is crucial that
the members selected to represent the group are women from the targeted group (Dixon, 1982).

**Women’s Strategic versus Practical Needs**

Afshar (1998) stresses the importance of recognizing that women and girls have both strategic and practical gender needs. She associates strategic needs with their generally subordinated role in society, such as division of labor, power, and control which adversely affect them, and the lack of legal rights, domestic violence, equal wages, and women’s control over their bodies. The practical gender needs are those that are related to their roles as subordinates, as well; but are generally concerned with inadequacies in living conditions, such as water provision, health care, and employment. Afshar (1998) states that these different needs, are frequently confused by planners. A clarification helps to identify what can be accomplished, as well as the limitations of interventions. There are some ways in which both can be addressed, such as the provision of new economic resources, new analytical skills and awareness, and mobilization around self-defined concerns and priorities.

The distinction between strategic and practical needs is useful for showing that when interventions are aimed at addressing both strategic and practical needs, empowerment in the long-term is more likely to be achieved; attending to welfare needs alone may not necessarily alter the power relationships between men and women or challenge their overall role in society. It is important for the achievement of empowerment that women themselves define what their strategic and practical needs are given their own particular experience and understanding of their situation (Afshar, 1998).
NGOs in Asia have participated actively in promoting access of women to skills that will improve their situation and enhance their contribution to development, however, only a few large NGOs such as BRAC in Bangladesh and Mahila Samakhanya in India have been able to organize extensive networks of centers. Their strength lies in their commitment, and in the rich diversity of their innovative pilot programs. Their weaknesses are limited financial and human resources (Jayaweera, 1993).

Edwards (2000) raises the question: what is the best way for non-governmental organizations to make a lasting impact on poverty? The basic premise is to reduce the burden of work on girls and women, as well as financial constraints on the parents, thus creating opportunities for women’s autonomy and education. The author summarized the findings of his research into the impact, sustainability and cost-effectiveness of two NGOs in India and two projects implemented by Save the Children Fund, UK, in Bangladesh.

Edwards (2000) stresses that NGO performance is the outcome of a dynamic interaction between external influences (context) and internal influences (organizational choices). These may seem obvious points; yet they are often neglected in evaluations which treat contextual factors as determinant – community characteristics, for example, or economic and political structures. This approach ignores the influence of the NGO itself – its strategies, culture, structure, mode of financing, and the decisions it takes over what is done, by whom and how. Research has shown that these internal characteristics are equally important in determining outputs and outcomes; and as the internal characteristics interact with external influences, eventual impacts.
Securing advances in both living standards and organizational skills is crucial for sustainable change. Finding and keeping the appropriate balance between the two Edwards (2000) concludes from his study of the four projects carried out in India and Bangladesh, emerges as a key element of NGO performance – the more the balance and the earlier it is established in the life of a program, the more successful the outcome will be. This is particularly important where relief or service provision provides an entry point. Unless attention is paid to awareness-raising and organizational development during the early phase, there is a tendency for programs to drift into service delivery later on.

Edwards (2000) further explains that each agency involved in the study looked at impact in three ways: material living conditions (incomes and services), organizational skills and capacities (confidence and associational strength) and political empowerment (influence over decision-making). At every stage in the development of the People’s Organizations (POs) organized under People’s Rural Educational Movement (PREM) in India, material and organizational advances have gone hand-in-hand. The Fishermen’s Union, for example, provides nets and practical support to improve fishing techniques and train young people in how to use them, at the same time it is empowering them in lobbying government to take action against illegal trawling. Advances in assets and services maintain people’s interest while the process of organizational development is continuing, and provide the security which is essential for poor people to take an active role in non-economic initiatives. At the same time, advances in confidence, skills, capacities, and institutions enable economic initiatives and services to be managed more
effectively and equitably at community level, and to help people to engage more effectively in a dialogue with government to share the costs and responsibilities of operating services into the future.

It can be concluded from the two case studies, cited above that there seems to be no correlation between effective performance and the use of formalized planning systems. A clear and shared sense of direction, flexibility to respond to changing needs and circumstances, and attention to learning and communication, seem to be more important. None of the four agencies in the study had a written strategic plan. There is no evidence that this harmed PREM or that the existence of such a plan would have helped. Informal mechanisms such as these are very powerful as they provide a more conducive atmosphere and support for giving the targeted groups a voice in the planning processes of NFE projects, than the more rigid and hierarchical organization (Edwards, 2000).

**The Process of Empowerment**

In patriarchal societies, the subordinate status of women signifies a lack of empowerment, in the sense that they are unable to take part in the decision-making processes on an equal footing with men, either within the household or in the society at large. This is especially true of those societies of Asia and Africa which Kandiyoti (1998) has described as classic patriarchies.

It is contended that women’s lack of empowerment in these societies emanates to a large extent from their relative lack of participation in the so-called gainful economic activities. By implication, it is generally implied that their increased participation in the economic sphere will lead to or at least facilitate their empowerment. This is a plausible
assumption, but one must consider the alternative state of affairs that women’s earnings may be appropriated or at least controlled by men, especially in those societies where women’s subordination is so deeply rooted in sociocultural norms that men’s control over women is taken for granted even by women themselves. It is possible that in such cases women may not get empowered enough to take part in intra-household decision-making with the same bargaining power as men, even after becoming economically active (Afshar, 1998; Murphy-Graham, 2008).

Sen (1999), on the other hand, posits that working outside the home and earning an independent income tend to have a clear impact on the social standing of a woman in the household and the society. Her contribution to the family prosperity is then more visible; and hence, the woman has more voice in the household.

However, in many ways, NGOs can be restricted in their efforts to bring about change, in some cases, by the participants themselves, such as in the case of female plantation workers in Sri Lanka. There was resistance to outside interference, on the part of the women themselves, who felt that their position might be threatened and family relations deteriorate if they insisted too strongly on their right to control their labor and the income derived from it. Owing to the delicacy of the personal and family issues, Z. Ahmad (1984) feels that it may be best to approach the problem in a somewhat indirect fashion, by arousing the women’s awareness, either by means of workshops such as those organized by ILO in Sri Lanka or through organizations of poor urban and rural women, such as BRAC, in Bangladesh.
Concerned individuals, men and women, with the necessary education and skills are working with poor women to help them form organizations that are self-reliant and self-managed. Such initiatives recognize the crucial importance of group action, especially when it concerns the very poor and the exploited that need to join together to take advantage of government programs as well as to make a concerted stand against all forms of exploitation (Z. Ahmad, 1984).

But women face a variety of problems in their attempts to organize. To begin with, they are burdened with a double workload, at home and at work. They have therefore little time to attend meetings. Moreover, in most traditional cultures women seldom speak up in meetings when men are present, so that their views are not always taken into account in arriving at decisions. In fact, very few women belong to high-level decision-making bodies; thus these bodies seldom represent the interests of women workers as a group. Furthermore, women are not always free to organize themselves, since decisions regarding their activities are often taken by male household members (Afshar, 1998; Ahmad, 1984; Edwards, 2000).

In her study, about rural women’s economic development and their empowerment, Bailey (2009) cites that the women’s families became enthusiastic about the women’s self-help group when they discovered the fiscal benefits that accrued to the families and the participating women achieved a relatively greater involvement in families’ decision-making processes. It also added another dimension that of the increased economic viability of the entire village as a result of the infrastructure
improvements and the investments in the education of the younger members of the community.

In her article, N. Ahmed (2000) has addressed some of the issues that have been raised above; including the issue of generative power and the associative practices regarding this power discussed by Afshar (1998) above. In her study in the village of Srefultoli, Bangladesh, N. Ahmed (2000) examined the experiences of the village women with nonformal education. She posits that research has shown that most NFE programs in developing countries give women traditional knowledge of family planning, nutrition, and health care, but they do not deal with the need to increase women’s awareness of their oppression and exploitation. N. Ahmed’s (2000) study examined whether the NFE programs in the village in Bangladesh gave women new knowledge about their current situation in the village society, as well as the family; and whether these women were conscious of their strategic and practical needs.

Traditional NFE programs and particularly government-offered nonformal development programs for women do not address the long-term, strategic needs of women; and they overlook existing socioeconomic and domestic roles (Murphy-Graham, 2008). However, NFE programs in Bangladesh run by nongovernmental organizations, particularly those offered by women-run organizations raised the consciousness of women regarding their situation in society and in the family (N. Ahmed, 2000).

In her study N. Ahmed (2000) discovered that the NGOs, in the village of Srefultoli offered adult education classes along with other development programs. They also gave loans and carried out different training programs for women. Some of the
NGOs primary objective was to bring together women to fight for their right to define their own priorities and to better the conditions of their existence. In their NFE syllabus, they not only included several issues of particular interest to women, such as dowry, divorce, oppression, exploitation and family laws; but they also asked women who had dealt with these issues and turned their lives around to work with the participants. Apparently, this is what La Belle (1984) is suggesting when she cites that in nonformal education, one need not be constrained by only the instructional aspects associated with microsocial change efforts; but also can be concerned with secondary, and prospectively more important, participatory experiences associated with informal education.

Grameen Bank has been tremendously instrumental in helping the poor rural women in Bangladesh to enter the economic domain with the aid of credit from the Grameen Bank. It differs from other banking institutions mainly in three ways. First, it confines its operations exclusively to the poor. Second, it provides credit without any collateral. Poor rural women are particularly helped in this way; as they are never able to provide collateral except through their husbands, because any asset possessed by the poor family is owned by the husband. And finally, loanees do not have to go to the bank; agents from the bank communicate with the women for banking operations. The latter is particularly helpful for the women, as the existing sociocultural norms restrict women’s mobility. In fact, the Bank has made it a special point to give priority to women while allocating credit. Grameen Bank has been going from strength to strength because of several factors that have contributed to the almost 99 percent of its loan recovery rate, one of which is group formation (Afshar, 1998). The practice of group formation reflects
some of the aspects described by Z. Ahmad (1984) and Dixon (1982). They contend that the extreme inequalities of wealth and the rigid caste hierarchies, characteristic of many regions of South Asia create easily identifiable groups of women who have common economic and social concerns. The existing bases of solidarity and cleavage can form natural building blocks for an employment policy designed to concentrate benefits among those who need them most.

The observance of group formation, Afshar (1998) argues helps in two distinct ways. First, it acts in lieu of tangible collateral. It is only natural that the borrowers might have the susceptibility to default in the absence of collateral. But this problem is tackled by the group liability system; as everyone is denied credit as punishment for default by anyone belonging to the group. In this way, peer group pressure is generated, inhibiting each member from defaulting. Second, as the group is formed by the borrowers themselves, it helps the Bank to select more desirable customers. The borrowers choose other members on the basis of mutual trust and personal understanding. As a result, a kind of homogeneous group is formed with the same level of skill.

But raising income is not the only way in which the Grameen Bank has benefited the rural women of Bangladesh. As N. Ahmed (2000) cites that apart from giving loans, the Bank also engages in a range of welfare activities and consciousness-raising programs. Borrowers are given advice regarding family planning, domestic abuse, first aid as well as personal and community hygiene. There are also free evening schools for them and their children. All borrowers are required to achieve the minimum literacy level of being able to sign their names, something that the majority of rural women cannot do.
N. Ahmed (2000) goes a little further in her research to enumerate some of the complaints women had with regard to the projects and the curriculum that the NGOs offered. For instance, some women who were willing to attend the NFE training classes did not participate, because the courses and programs were not deemed by them as beneficial to their particular circumstances. All participating women supported the view that they needed some productive training and courses which would prepare them to earn some cash money.

Most women in Srefutoli had experience in agricultural work. They also helped their husbands during the harvest time. The women who were involved with agriculture expressed interest in agricultural training programs. They wanted to learn more innovative techniques and processes in agriculture that would save them time and energy and they could help their husbands as well. They pointed out that irrigation was a problem in Srefultoli and came up with the suggestion that providing them with some pump machines at a low cost would solve their irrigation problems. This indicated that the NGO had achieved its objective of helping the women to make decisions about their lives (N. Ahmed, 2000).

However, poor or illiterate women may be, they are not necessarily unaware of their handicaps if they were to stay in the oppressive circumstances that they were subjected to. For example, in West Bengal, India, tribal women participating in a laborer’s camp (workshop) in Bankura insisted that the Sarkar [government] should allocate homestead land in the name of both spouses, so that the husband would not have the sole right to dispose of it without consulting his wife (Z. Ahmad, 1984).
Similarly, N. Ahmed (2000) explains that the women in Srefutoli, Bangladesh felt that they benefited from the NGOs programs that talked about women’s domestic issues and their oppression; signifying that they were very much aware of their subjugated status and needed help to alleviate their circumstances. They also said that before going to NFE classes, they did not know how to talk to other people. Now, however, they can express their views and opinions. They discuss family planning with their husbands, and decide about future children. Now, they feel that women have become stronger and confident.

It is clear that all participants wanted education and training to provide them with skills to earn an income which would free them from their dependence on men and would give them the ability to adequately support their families. They all felt that financial independence was the first step towards their empowerment.

Moreover, the participants strongly argued that no education or opportunity will change their status, without a dramatic, substantial, and basic change in the attitudes of the men. Therefore, the women believed that if men can be educated to change their outlook about women, they will value women’s education. They further added that the reason for the low percentage of men attending the programs is their dislike of NFE curriculum. If curriculum can be adapted, so that men would come to the classes with their wives, it would help to improve communication between men and women (N. Ahmed, 2000).

In this regard, Aksornkol (1997) contends that opening up opportunities for women also means increasing options for men. Although women bear an unfair share of
burden, in the family and society, their grievances might need to be seen from the male perspective as well. The gender perspective helps look at what men stand to gain if nonformal education programs become gender-sensitive (N. Ahmed, 2000).

Opening up opportunities for women, also means increasing options for men. Once the rigid demarcation lines of tasks, roles, and functions are broken down, men would not be stigmatized if women can share the burden of supporting the family. This would decrease the pressure on men to make ends meet as breadwinners (Ahmed 2000; Aksornkol, 1997).

As can be seen from the study done by N. Ahmed (2000) income-generating programs were desperately needed. In terms of economic gain, these women’s economic status might not change dramatically, but they need to earn something and gain a degree of financial independence. According to N. Ahmed (2000), economic independence is the first step to women’s sovereignty. Yet because the needs are overwhelming, they can be fulfilled only by utilizing a variety of educational approaches. If the governments and other organizations work together, they could better address the needs of rural women in Bangladesh. It would be helpful if the NFE curriculum provided these women with some kind of job market analysis and helped women to make more realistic choices, about job training (N. Ahmed, 2000).

Furthermore, the process of becoming literate must be as important for women as the end result of being literate. Literacy programs must be dialogical, involving women at various levels of program design and implementation (N. Ahmed, 2000).
Whereas some benefits to women may be fairly easy to measure, such as improvements in health, increased childcare facilities, and easier access to drinking water, other, less tangible benefits, especially empowerment itself are more involved. First, there is the question of what empowerment actually is. As Afshar (1998) described above, it is an abstract concept capable of interpretation in many ways. But what does this mean in the infinite number of different contexts in which empowerment initiatives are carried out and particularly taking into account the women beneficiaries’ own perspective?

Empowerment often seems to be taken to mean participation in communal activities as interventions aimed at assisting women seem to concentrate on, thereby merely increasing women’s burden of work. It is only in fact where the interventions are actually increasing women’s active participation in decision making, that empowerment could be occurring (Afshar, 1998).

The empowerment process is not necessarily linear, but more like a loop or a spiral. Furthermore, certain activities may be empowering in one way and disempowering in another, especially, if the different kinds of power: power over, power to, power with, power within are taken into account, and the two spheres of individual and collective power. There are many other arenas too, in which women can become empowered – political, economic, health, education, and home (Afshar, 1998).

It is important for NGOs, to take into account the culturally and contextually defined structures of gender relations when analyzing a population’s problems, prior to planning a project. By structures is meant the divisions between men and women - of
roles, resources and power within social organizations, such as the family, the market, the state, and the community. Interrelations between class, caste, ethnicity and race, and all kinds of material inequalities, as well as gender, which determine the division of resources and responsibilities, also require consideration. All these processes are dynamic and ongoing. Finally, the status of the social resources held by women needs to be analyzed, such as women’s organizations as it is these which will allow them to take full advantage of economic development (Afshar, 1998; Dixon, 1982).

Kabeer (2000) contends that the equation between power and choice finds it far more difficult to accommodate forms of gender inequality when these appear to have been chosen by women themselves; in other words, when the women have internalized their social status as persons of lesser value. Women’s acceptance of their secondary claims on household resources, their acquiescence to violence at the hands of their husbands, their willingness to bear children at the detriment of their own health to satisfy their own or their husbands’ preference for sons, are all examples of behavior by women which undermine their own well-being.

Kabeer’s (2000) argument is that while these forms of behavior could reflect choice, they are also choices which stem from and serve to reinforce women’s subordinate status. They remind us that power relations are expressed not only through the exercise of agency and choice, but also through the kinds of choices people make. She goes on to explain that any intervention aimed at transforming women’s lives without some knowledge of ways of being and doing which are realizable and valued by women in a particular setting runs into the danger of proposing a process of empowerment, and
hence violating the essence of the process which is to enhance women’s capacity for self-determination. Sen (1999) contends that:

The deprived people tend to come to terms with their deprivations because of the sheer necessity of survival, and they may, as a result, lack the courage to demand any radical change, and may even adjust their desires and expectations to what they unambitiously see as feasible. (p. 63)

Sen (1999) posits that social and economic factors such as basic education, elementary health care, and secure employment can pull these women out of poverty and on their way to empowerment. These considerations, Sen (1999) stresses require knowledge of the ways of being and doing that the people value. In fact United Nations Development Program’s (UNDP) Asia-Pacific Human Development Report (HDR) (2010) states in its explanation of gender equality: “No society can be fair and just—regardless of culture, history, ethnicity or religion—if freedoms and choice for all people are not a reality” (p.23). Moreover, HDR (2011) defines human development as: “Human development is the expansion of people’s ‘freedoms’ and ‘capabilities’ to lead lives that they value and have reason to value” (p. 1).

Asia-Pacific HDR (2010) cites that women experience persistent gender deficits in both capabilities and opportunities. Women acquire fewer capabilities than men across much of the region; they still have less education and much poorer health, for example. But even when they have capabilities, they face shortages in opportunities, such as when women face opportunity barriers to paid work. (Asia-Pacific Human Development Report 2010) This lack of capabilities and opportunities might create problems for women in
their struggle to sustain a sense of empowerment (Monkman, 1998; Nussbaum, 2004; Seeberg, 2011).

In renegotiating the patriarchal structures regulatory control may shift from the privacy of the household to ancillary agencies or state institutions. For example, policies that grant NGOs the work of generating income also grant them the right to regulate programs that tie credit access to required changes in women’s behavior. Increasingly, in this context, the voice of public authority replaces the individual male as the moral regulator of community values and the general patriarch. The consequences of this transition are also contradictory. Women are viewed as dependent upon a universal male, the gendered state, even as their rights as citizens to new resources and opportunities for organizing collective claims against the state are denied (Feldman, 2001).

Real democratization that can empower women as well as men has been achieved in the West in an indigenous and gradual way from the bottom up and with the active participation of the middle and working classes and civil society organizations, as well as through the top-down initiatives of intellectuals and state elites. In the Muslim context, however, modernization, including improvement in women’s rights and status, has been a state-centered, elitist, rapid, exogenous, authoritarian, and class polarizing process (Tohidi, 2003).

**NGOs and Islamist Resistance**

The wide gap between the modernized (usually Westernized) state elite and the masses, socio-economic dislocation and polarized class stratification (a very small number of rich at the top and a very large number of poor at the bottom, hence a small
middle class), corruption and authoritarian repression of political society (no effective political parties and opposition) and civil society organizations have left no or little space for citizen’s participation in decision making. As a result, in the eyes of many alienated Muslims, modernization led by secular nationalist or socialist elites has been associated with Western imperialism; to be resisted by holding onto the old traditions. A traditionalist version of Islam is considered as the strongest asset for demarcating cultural boundaries (Tohidi, 2003).

The proliferation of fatwas [sermons] against women – inevitably from disempowered backgrounds – partly represents the success of Islamist groups in generating support on a platform of pro-Islamic, anti-Western sentiment, drawing in at the same time the interests of the local elite. Attacking women’s projects sponsored by NGOs has become an effective means of fighting NGO influence in general. The coordinating Council of Human Rights in Bangladesh has suggested that economic factors may partly motivate clerics to issue fatwas against NGOs. Madrasas are losing students to NGO education programs. Rural moneylenders, along with the clergy and large landowners from the local elite are being replaced by NGOs that provide low interest loans. This allows for the emergence of newly configured alliances between religious leaders and locally dominant figures. The intensification of corrupt patronage systems sustained by foreign assistance and the increasing presence of and opposition to NGOs provide a fertile ground for Islamist rhetoric (Bodman & Tohidi, 1998).
Successful NFE Programs by NGOs

Many organizations have achieved varying degrees of success, keeping in consideration the cultural and social, as well as class, caste and ethnicity characteristics; while designing women’s and girls’ empowerment projects. In rural Afghanistan, for example, elders, religious leaders, and local *shuras* (consultative councils) all function as establishing points in a volatile environment. There, the NGOs employed a different operational strategy. Rather than confront the power structure of the rural areas directly, some Afghani Non-Governmental Organizations (ANGOs) have tried an incrementalist approach. For example, they have initiated *Karez* (cleaning) programs. In the short term, this improves irrigation and food production; in the long run, such projects may develop into new forms of collective action. Ultimately, the collective action may become an empowering process which will meet the long-term strategic needs of vulnerable sectors (Afshar, 1998; Eade, 2000).

Sutton and Arnove (2004) studied the execution of the Teacher Empowerment Program (TEP), in India. They posit that perhaps the most important element of TEP is the active participation and decision making of the teachers and their union. Even, before, he began working with the teachers, UNICEF organizer Henriques believed that if the people whose welfare is intended are involved in the task; they will gain confidence and find themselves capable of continuing the efforts on their own.

Henriques’ initial goal was to make sure the teachers trusted his commitment. The teachers’ trust was essential, yet a successful education program also depends on the government’s role in its development, funding, and implementation. India is reputed for
its political corruption with inactive, disinterested officials. Yet Henriques had faith that the government would eventually claim a role in this program. The teachers and Henriques worked together for over a year before gaining much government support. But as the program became successful among the teachers and spread from district to district, the chief education minister became an advocate and wanted to implement the program throughout the state. Henriques considers this political support as critical for the program and he made a note in his report that the ministers came to regard the TEP as something from which they could get political mileage (Edwards, 2000; Sutton & Arnove, 2004).

Sutton and Arnove (2004) go on to contend that beyond the long-term interactions of field representatives, the good diplomacy and interpersonal skills of officers at the state and national level is also crucial to maintain communication and a working relationship.

Sutton and Arnove (2004) further argue that in any partnership, even though the principals start out with differing roles based on their expertise, capacities, and self-interests, however, as the partnership develops groups may change their image and roles and even their opinions about each other. When TEP partnership began, issues of misused power and mistrust existed. In particular, the relationship between GOI (Government of India) and the teachers and their unions was strained. The respondents to the study claimed that the government officials feared to trust the teachers. The government also feared that the union would gain power. Teachers distrusted the government, feeling that they were unheard, neglected, paid poorly, and mistreated. They held little power to make needed changes.
Interestingly, UNICEF played a mediating role through the TEP by aiding teacher union and government communication and cooperation. That a teacher union became a partner in this program is an anomaly. But more importantly, union’s role as partner prevents the program from being just another top-down mandated policy devised by the national government and a donor. The teachers participated, they had voice, and they made decisions about curriculum and training and helped to design the teachers’ manual. They had assumed ownership in the TEP and a moral responsibility to their teaching. One clear indicator of this successful partnership is that no primary school strike had occurred in two years (Afshar, 1998; Sutton & Arnove, 2004).

UNICEF’s goal was to eventually phase out its role in the program, leaving a sustainable structure. To achieve more independence and work toward long-term goals, without the donor, the government and the teachers must remain close partners (Sutton & Arnove, 2004).

O’Malley (2005) did two case studies in Afghanistan that focus on girls who were empowered through UNICEF-funded and organized programs. He explains that Taliban had smashed up Kokabar’s beauty parlor. Now, she has two salons for which she got help and resources from a UNICEF-supported scheme - one of several ways, the NGO is trying to reach the children, especially girls. The scheme is run in collusion with a local NGO, Aschiana on a strict commitment to provide 50% of places for girls. Aschiana gives the children a year’s literacy classes and ten months’ vocational training, plus a placement in income-earning activities such as beauty treatment, tailoring, carpentry or...
livestock management. They will then be able to enter formal schooling by sitting in an exam to determine their grade, or go off and make an income.

UNICEF representative Bernt Aasen said that despite a massive campaign to get girls into school in Afghanistan, boys have benefited more. In nine provinces, less than 10% of the students are girls and in two or three provinces, there are virtually none at all (O’Malley, 2005).

High on the Salang slopes, in Afghanistan, might be one possible solution. Parvin 18 and Nasreen 15 were refugees in Iran, during the war on terrorism in Afghanistan. In Iran they studied till grade 10. When they returned, they were given 15 days’ intensive training in child-centered methods and accelerated learning techniques under a community school scheme run jointly by the Afghan government and UNICEF. The targeted community was meant to provide a room and salary, but in this case, the father of the girls had not received anything, but still provided the room and the daughters gave instruction on voluntary basis (O’Malley, 2005).

In Pakistan, Bunyad a local NGO has had a positive effect on the lives of girls and young women. Bunyad relates to smaller NGOs and community-based organizations, as well as to larger NGOs, government, and donors in an effort to enable greater access to resources and services. When Bunyad started its NFE program for girls, parents were reluctant to send their daughters to the centers. But a follow up study indicated that 34% of the girls who completed the primary level in Bunyad’s centers were pursuing further education. Most of the others desired to do so, but could not because there were no middle schools nearby. Bunyad focuses on out-of-school girls. Recognizing the extreme
poverty of some communities, education was introduced in ways that enabled economic activity to continue. Bunyad worked intensively with communities right from the start to induce full understanding of what was proposed and put the selection of the teachers in the hands of the local people. This meant that the communities took ongoing responsibility for the education of their girls (Afshar, 1998; Bunyad, 2011; Mukhtar & Khalid, 2000).

**Summary**

While seemingly universal, the particular structure of patriarchy is always historically determined, since it is formed in conjunction with specific social environment. Under capitalism, the kinship relations and exchange of commodities characterizing previous (agricultural) patriarchal societies are displaced by new class relations and commodity exchange. The production of life, specifically subsistence goods and human life is subsumed under the privileged, profit-making production of commodities in terms of wage labor – the production of things – while domestic labor is literally de-valued as non-wage labor. Feudalism, an extension of patriarchy is also instrumental in delegating women to a subordinate position in their families and the larger socioeconomic environment.

Western education for women, especially for Muslim women, during the colonizing period was merely a means to the end of making them good wives and mothers, to teach them to run their households according to the new physical and economic conditions of the modern world. They might even be allowed into the outside world, as long as it did not threaten their femininity and interfere with their womanly
responsibilities. This interpretation of the new woman continues even today in the postcolonial countries.

In renegotiating the patriarchal structures, regulatory control may shift from the privacy of the household to ancillary agencies or state institutions. The consequences of this transition are also contradictory. Women are viewed as dependent upon a universal male, the gendered state, even as their rights as citizens to new resources and opportunities for organizing collective claims against the state are denied (Feldman, 2001).

There are several forms of strategizing that women undertake when living within a set of tangible constraints. These strategies have been defined by Kandiyoti (1988) as patriarchal bargains. For example, in Bangladesh, the garment factory workers use idioms of kinship and generation – bhai or chacha to refer to male coworkers and apa or didi to refer to senior female workers - as a way to redefine their relationship to nonfamilial male workers, and to establish a sense of connectedness to the female workers.

Patriarchy has some grave implications for women. The facets of women’s lives that are most acutely affected by the constrictions of classic patriarchy are the autonomy of women, their fertility, and their education.

With the pressure of increasing poverty, the kinship institutions that support male dominance and authority remain strong and intact, while the associated sanctions that ensure that males carry out their responsibilities to women have weakened. The institutions that support male authority also work to keep women’s wages much lower than those of the male workers, as women are not considered to be the breadwinners.
With increasing unemployment, the sons are leaving the extended family home to find employment; hence they are setting up a home with just the husband, the wife and the children. This nuclear family is not only the family of the male-female couple; it is also decidedly male-dominated. It is assumed that this is natural and hence a voluntary contribution on the part of the women with no bearing upon female agency. In reality, women’s lives – including women in Muslim majority contexts – are adversely affected by global economics that presume the fulfillment of multiple extended tasks without the domain of an equally extended family (Wadud, 2006).

With new opportunities and greater mobility, men are moving away from the farms and many women are taking on the major responsibility of the household agricultural system. Women’s work burden has increased. Young daughters drop out of school to help their mothers and the consequence is high female illiteracy.

Z. Ahmad (1984) shows that technological progress has resulted in the creation of new inequalities between rural men and women. In many cases the introduction of modern techniques has increased the already heavy burden of work for women, especially during periods of peak labor demand.

In Bangladesh, the encroachment of the garment girls on conveniently male social and economic spaces has generated widespread anxiety. By their very visibility, factory workers articulate both fears of unregulated sexuality and the threat of the usurpation of male economic roles.

The preference for sons and the advantages attached to them affect a woman’s decisions about birth control, as there is a long tradition and compulsion for larger
families. Son-preference also results in discrimination against the daughters. Such discrimination usually affects girls’ access to education.

The concept of non-formal education is not new to the developing countries; human societies have always used various forms of nonformal education to transmit their heritage of values, customs, beliefs, technologies, and skills to each new generation.

Women need an independent source of income and an understanding of the economic and political systems, so that they can empower themselves. Moreover, as is clear from N. Ahmed’s (2000) study of the village women in Bangladesh, the women needed to talk about their domestic problems as well as support for dealing with those problems. Hence, the sociocultural issues should also get emphasis when designing non-formal education programs. Moreover, the design process should involve the women for whom nonformal education programs are intended, so that they can delineate their own problems and needs, as it is clear from N. Ahmed’s (2000) study that the women are fully perceptive of their needs.

The studies of poor women’s organizations in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh provide certain preliminary guidelines for participative, grass-roots types of development. At present, with high levels of illiteracy and exploitation from which women continue to suffer, the active support and collaboration of outside allies is indispensable. At the same time education and skill training are urgently needed by poor, illiterate women so that they can gradually learn to manage their own organizations. Another highly controversial area that needs attention is whether working women should concentrate on forming their own organizations or seek membership in organizations open to both sexes. It seems,
women workers need separate organizations of their own to further and defend their special interests vis-à-vis elite organizations as well as the men in their own family. But as this is a highly controversial issue; it can only be resolved with innovative methods seeking to ensure equal participation of women in worker’s organizational structures and decision-making.

Dixon (1982) echoes Z. Ahmad’s (1984) view point when she contends that the extreme inequalities of wealth and the rigid caste hierarchies, characteristic of many regions of South Asia create easily identifiable groups of women who have common economic and social concerns. The argument here is not that class and caste divisions should be perpetuated but rather that existing bases of solidarity and cleavage can form natural building blocks for an employment policy designed to concentrate benefits among those who need them most.

Providing new or alternative sources of employment for poor rural women, Dixon (1982) further argues serves to reduce the landless families’ dependence on the landowners and the women’s dependence on the men; and in many cases prove to be the sole means of the women’s survival. In the long run, concentrating the benefits of new employment schemes among women in the poorest and most culturally stigmatized sectors of the population should challenge the prevailing hierarchy, in a fundamental way.

Afshar (1998) has demarcated some of the instruments and theoretical frame works to overcome the constraints that NGOs face in their quest for the empowerment of girls and women. The complex and contradictory nature of empowerment, Afshar (1998)
argues makes it virtually impossible to say, in absolute terms what a given intervention has achieved, especially in the long term. Nevertheless, she feels that it should not be an excuse for not trying to produce some evidence of progress.

Edwards (2000) argues that it is often unclear who is to be empowered: the individual, the community or categories of people, such as women, the poor or the socially excluded. There seems to be a need to conceptualize participatory processes more broadly. Edwards (2000) also suggests reconsideration of the role of the state in development, as several studies now link meaningful social change to state action, prompted by powerful social movements for change.

The following examples make it obvious that some of the organizations have achieved varying degrees of success in their endeavors to empower women by utilizing some of the strategies described by Afshar (1998) and Edwards (2000).

For instance, the Teacher Empowerment Program (TEP), in India is a clear manifestation of the fact that the majority of nonformal education programs are run by international or national NGOs; but they cannot continue and grow unless they have the support and infrastructure provided by the local and national governments. Therefore, it is feasible for the NGOs to stay in steady contact with the branches of the government engaged with the programs (Edwards, 2000; Stacki, 2004). The international organizations eventually phase out of a project. If the goal is to ensure a sustainable structure, it becomes even more essential that the clients, the governments, and the local organizations remain close partners, once the donor-involvement fades out (Sutton & Arnove, 2004).
Another point to keep in mind for NGOs, while organizing non-formal education projects, especially for Muslim women is that, no matter how it is described: “Islamic gender activism,” “Islamic gender reformism,” or “Islamic feminism,” it is a growing and potent force that should be taken seriously. It should be welcomed as *one* of the various voices and discourses present within the multifaceted identity of the women’s movements in the Muslim world.

Despite Islam’s overall egalitarian message, the Islamic tradition, as it had evolved encouraged certain discriminatory practices against women. Bodman and Tohidi (1998); Tohidi (2003) state that historically it was inevitable for Islamic societies to inherit patriarchy. But religion has not been for all women merely a social constraint or a set of passively accepted doctrines. If we take a clergy-centered view of religion, it would undermine the degree to which women reformers’ relationship to religion was not defined and controlled by men or by male theological interpretations.

The assorted sections in the literature review represent the various facets of Pakistani women’s lives. Among various other factors, patriarchy and poverty are the most pervasive dynamics of the sociocultural fabric of the lower SES women’s lives.

The section titled Background: on the Sociocultural Influences on Pakistani Women’s Current educational and Emancipation status was basically put together to get an insight into some of the crucial sociocultural influences in Pakistani women’s, especially the lower SES women’s lives and how those influences had shaped women’s lives, through history.
As the focus of my study was nonformal education designed by NGOs; the section on nonformal education and the NGOs was essential for an understanding of the process of nonformal education and the role of NGOs in that process.

The next section: Current Educational and Emancipation Status of Women: Facilitative and Obstructive Factors - as the section-heading indicates - deals with the enabling factors, as well as barriers in the way of women’s enrollment and continuation in NFE. While there are some facilitative factors which are basically fashioned by the NGOs, the barriers are overwhelming and essentially sociocultural. This was the section that led to the first two of my research questions which deal with the facilitating and obstructive factors. Most of the facilitative factors in the literature pointed to the NGOs’ successful planning of the projects. This raised the question: if there were any facilitative factors in the sociocultural fabric of the participants, hence the research question, what are the facilitative factors in women’s education?

The third section deals with NFE and NGOs. The constraints the NGOs are faced with in the implementation of their projects and what factors can contribute to the success of a project, as well as the role of the participants. The essence of the literature on NGOs and NFE was that input from participants needed to be an integral part of a project design if the needs of the targeted women are to be fully realized. This section was responsible for my third research question which asks: what women want from education?

As far as interview questions are concerned, I picked questions from each sub-section of the latter two sections - Current Educational and Emancipation Status of the women: Facilitating and Obstructive Factors and Nonformal Education and NGOs:
Possibilities for Lower SES Women. Table II, in Chapter III contains excerpted parts of the literature and the interview questions related to those parts.
CHAPTER III

DESIGN, METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

There is evidence that education plays a prominent role in enhancing almost every dimension of autonomy for women, whereas wage work has a positive but less consistent effect. Yet large proportions of women in developing countries, such as Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh have never been to school, and few have completed primary school. While some NGOs have achieved a modicum of success in educating women in these countries, their efforts have been focused on the functional literacy – basic education and some vocational training attached to it. Hence, very little information is available on why women attend nonformal programs, what do they learn, what do they do with the education, and what opportunities they have to use what they have learned, and how literacy impacts women’s lives.

Studies that were presented in the review of literature to understand the women’s education and the restraints in their educational achievement made it exceedingly apparent that there is a need to capture a more emic understanding of the supportive and constrictive influences, on the education of women.

Design

In an effort to understand the dilemma of women’s education, from the women’s perspective, I conducted a qualitative interpretive study of the educational experiences of the lower socio-economic status women. The goal was to understand the factors that
facilitate the women to participate in non-formal education projects, obstacles to the accessibility of education, and the educational needs of these women.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the objects of an interpretive qualitative approach are the lived experiences of real people in real settings. The intent is to explore human behavior within the context of their natural occurrence.

The interpretive approach seeks to understand the world from the perspective of those living in it. Interpretive studies try to capture the perspectives that the individuals use as a basis for their actions in specific social settings. Erikson (1996) identifies the key questions that researchers using this approach ask as: “What is happening here, specifically? What do these happenings mean to the people engaged in them?” (p. 124). The voices of the participants must be prominent in an interpretive approach (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

It is characteristic of qualitative research that studies change as they are being implemented. Because the goal is to actually get inside a social phenomenon in a special setting, it is impossible to construct a design a priori that takes into account what the researcher finds out upon actually entering a social setting to be studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher collects as many detailed specifics as possible from the research setting and then sets about the process of looking for patterns of relationship, among the specifics. Findings generated from this process are said to be grounded in the data – generated from the ground up. The overall pattern of data analysis in the interpretive qualitative approach is decidedly inductive, moving from specific to analytic generalizations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). And this was the approach that I followed.
In qualitative work, it is understood that the act of studying a social phenomenon influences the enactment of that phenomenon. Researchers are a part of the world they study. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) posit that, “this is not a matter of methodological commitment, it is an existential fact. There is no way to escape the social world in order to study it” (p.15). The capacity to be reflexive, to keep track of one’s biases, and to monitor one’s emotional responses allows researchers to get close enough to human action to understand what is going on. The process of reflexivity is essential to the integrity of qualitative research (Goodall, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In addition to establishing validity through the self-reflective process of “bracketing” - carried out in the memo-writing - whereby I could recognize and set aside (but do not discard) my a priori knowledge and assumptions, focus group data was a valuable resource for research triangulation.

To illustrate how phenomena can get distorted by a priori knowledge and the assumptions based on that knowledge, I will give an example. One day, while I was observing the learning session, a few women were gossiping about Nasima, another participant. This was early in the study when I hadn’t interviewed the women yet and didn’t know much about them. The women talked about how difficult Nasima’s life is because her husband doesn’t work and her mother-in-law is mean to her. This led me to picture Nasima’s husband as a very lazy, unsupportive person—emotionally as well as financially. I noted this in my field note memos. Later, when I interviewed Nasima, I found out that he was supportive of Nasima’s goal to get education and a loving father to her son from her first marriage. My preconceptions based on gossip had led me to an
incorrect interpretation about Nasima’s husband’s personality. After this I refrained from putting much value on hearsay.

Data collected from individual interviews was triangulated with data from focus groups and the memos. Here, the intent was to collect data on the same phenomenon from a variety of sources (Hatch, 2002; H. Rubin & I. Rubin, 2005; Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

To help recognize distortions, fabrications, and omissions, I built redundancy into the design by asking some of the same questions to different people in separate roles in ways that allowed me to check interviews for consistency. Such as, asking the same questions of the teacher and the literacy coordinator of the NFE project, which I asked the participants (Creswell & Miller, 2002; Creswell, 2008; Hatch, 2002; Rubin, H. & Rubin, I. 2005; Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

Memos or what Creswell and Miller (2002); Creswell (2008) and Hatch (2002) call “unobtrusive data” – data which provide insight into the social phenomenon under investigation without interfering with the enactment of the social phenomenon - proved to be a valuable tool for conceptual validity. Interview data when compared to memos turned out to be fairly helpful in confirming the concepts derived from the interviews. Moreover, personal communications are a type of unobtrusive data that can be collected as part of qualitative studies. In the case of this study, unofficial communications between the researcher, participants, teacher, NGO staff and even the families of the participants were also valuable in seeking conceptual validity.
Setting

The context for this study was a lower socio-economic status neighborhood in the village of Naseerabad, in the province of Punjab, in Pakistan. The village of Naseerabad is located at the margins of the city of Lahore. The highway to the village was two-lane, both ways, the street that led into the village was mud, but the alleys leading to brick homes were paved. The alleys were paved but it seemed as if they had been dug up again. There were water puddles and mud, at places. Some empty lots were strewn with garbage and plastic bags. The natural gas pipelines were laid and the gas meters were visible, but the inhabitants used wood to cook their meals. The literacy center was set up in the home of a resident, for which the homeowners didn’t charge any rent. The daughter of the owner who had a bachelors’ degree was the teacher. The women used to sit on a rug spread out on the floor of the front porch.

Globalization had reached into the area via a shoe factory across the highway that led to the village. The factory offers some low-skilled, temporary employment to the male residents of the village.

Figure 1 below shows a map of Lahore, Pakistan and its nearby borders with India. The village Naseerabad is located at the city limits of Lahore and about 20 minutes’ drive from the border with India. The exact location of the village is not provided to protect participant confidentiality. Figure II shows a schematic map of Naseerabad, with the literacy center and the location of the homes of the participants.
Figure 1. Map of Pakistan
Figure 2. Schematic Map of Naseerabad
**Participants**

The participants were women: fifteen years of age and above. These women included those who were enrolled in non-formal education, had one or two years of formal schooling and then dropped out.

The participant-selection was founded on the maximum variation in social, financial and other background factors. This kind of sampling is used when the study seeks to find central themes that are shared by a variety of participants (Hatch, 2002).

The number of participants was eight. I have created an abbreviated portrait of the participants in the form of a table below. This might be helpful in contextualizing the findings later in Chapter IV.

Table 1

*Biographical Portrait of Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fazal Bibi</td>
<td>50 to 60</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noreen</td>
<td>30 to 35</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karima</td>
<td>20 to 25</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aamna</td>
<td>40 to 45</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Munira</td>
<td>50 to 60</td>
<td>Widow</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasima</td>
<td>18 to 20</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saadia</td>
<td>15 to 20</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samina</td>
<td>15 to 18</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Data Collection Methods and Procedures**

The data collection strategies included audio-recordings and transcripts of semi-structured interviews with the participants, two focus groups, memos, and secondary data such as international documents, e.g., UNESCO and journal articles written by educators and researchers (Hatch, 2002, Maxwell, 2005).

I carried out the study under the auspices of the Bunyad Foundation, an NGO which is working in more than 20 districts and 2000 villages in Pakistan. Starting from literacy and non-formal education for girls, Bunyad has diversified into fields; such as, child labor, women’s empowerment, microcredit, community development, farming, sanitation, reproductive health and environment (Bunyad, 2011).

Bunyad has also worked with several formal schools through projects such as Universal Primary Education (UPE), Government-NGO partnerships adopting government schools and undertaking their improvement as part of efforts to mainstream children from non-formal education centers (Bunyad, 2011).

Bunyad is primarily funded by ILO, UNICEF, UNESCO and the World Bank, as well as private philanthropic individuals and organizations (Bunyad, 2011).

Persons related to education, in Pakistan, had mentioned Bunyad to me as doing good work in education, especially women’s education. On completing research on the NGO, I contacted the director of Bunyad, in Lahore. She arranged for the literacy coordinator of the NGO for Lahore to contact me. The Naseerabad village is about 40 minutes’ drive from where I was staying. The literacy coordinator and I set a day to visit the literacy center. Before heading out to the village for the visit, I did some research on
the village and discovered that it was representative of the majority of the villages which are in close proximity to a big city, like Lahore, in northern Punjab - in relation to socio-cultural issues as well as the economics of unemployment and the poverty.

The literacy training project in Naseerabad was the only one that was ever carried out, in that village. This was mostly funded by the government of Punjab. One of the officials in the ministry of education had known about Bunyad’s work for women’s education, therefore he had asked the director to design a project. The project had started in September, 2010 and was going to end in February, 2011. There were no plans to extend the program or to take it to another level, that of vocational training. The goal of the ongoing NFE training was to provide women with basic education in Urdu and math. The curriculum consisted of a book, which had lessons in reading and writing practice as well as basic math exercises in Urdu. The teacher used both Urdu and Punjabi, as languages of instruction, because some women were more comfortable in Punjabi than in Urdu. An effort was made to relate the curriculum to the participants’ environment. For example, the reading chapters provided women with the basics of growing vegetables in their homes, so that their families could get clean, nutritious food. The women met six days a week. The session started at 9 AM and ended at 11 AM.

My first contact with the participants was in January of 2011. It was an introduction with the teacher and the participants. After this initial contact, I started my study as a participant observer. Originally, I had planned to observe the literacy sessions for 10 days to gain the participants’ trust and to establish rapport with them, before the recruitment process began. The literacy coordinator suddenly told me that I only had five
more days to wind up the study and that the interview with each participant would only
be half an hour long for each participant.

My unease about the restrictions was eliminated by the candidness of the
participants in answering the interview questions and in focus groups with the
participants. The informal discussions with NGO staff and the teacher turned out to offer
rich data for triangulation.

After seven days of observations, the teacher and I consulted about the selection
of participants. I had wanted participants from varied backgrounds in terms of education,
economics and marital status. We decided on eight participants whose biographical
portrait I have given above, in Table 1.

**Focus Groups**

Krueger (1994) defines focus groups as sets of individuals with similar
characteristics or having shared experiences. In Morgan’s (1997) words, “the hallmark of
focus groups is their explicit use of the group interaction to produce data and insights that
would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group” (p. 2). I decided to do
the focus group with the teacher, the literacy coordinator, and the male mobilizer Farhan,
first. Farhan was not directly involved with the women’s literacy project, but he worked
with Bunyad as a mobilizer. In case, the women in the literacy program had any problems
from the men, in the community, Farhan would be the one who dealt with the men.
Farhan was a part of this focus group because he could give a man’s perspective. It
cannot be said that he was representative of all men in the village, but he was a part of the
socio-cultural structure of the area. Moreover, he was the one who used to guide me
through the alleys to the literacy center before I could maneuver the winding paths on my own. In the case of the women, it was the teacher, Nida who acted as a mobilizer, as well. She was the one who went to the women’s homes to convince the mothers and the mothers-in-law to let the women come and if the women did not show up for the sessions, in the morning, to bring them over.

On the day the first focus group took place, the teaching session was reduced to one hour from 9 AM to 10AM. The women went home and the last hour was taken over by the focus group. I essentially asked the same questions that I would be asking the participants, except for some demographic questions, for example, if the center had any problems with persons that were against the women coming to the center.

Doing focus group with the teacher and the NGO officials gave me some information on the background of the women. This proved helpful when I did the focus group with the women, as well as individual interviews.

The second focus group was with the participating women. It also took place in the second half of the learning session. In this case, it was not possible to isolate the participating women from the rest because the other women wanted to be a part of the group. It seemed rude to say no and would not have helped with my rapport with them, and would have hindered the data collection process. Therefore, the focus group with the women consisted of 12 women, who generally came to the center regularly. One of these women is Basheera who was not individually interviewed, but was part of the focus group. Her story is one of the stories in Chapter IV, under individual stories.
The focus group with the participants was intended to put them at ease, so that they could give voice to their experiences and opinions, in case they were hesitant to talk individually. The focus group also functioned to confirm the validity of the data as it provided the opportunity for asking questions from several perspectives. Moreover, all interviews were conducted with the help of the teacher whom the participants trusted enough to be able to talk candidly to the researcher.

**Interviews**

The interviews with the participants took place within the same timeframe as the focus groups, i.e. in the latter part of the learning session. Interviews were conducted in as natural a setting and manner, as possible. I interviewed two women separately in one hour. Thereby, each interview lasted half an hour. Some of the women who did not have any pressing chores at home stayed back. Even when the teacher said they were free to go, they responded that they wanted to listen in. The women being interviewed assured me that they did not mind an audience.

To minimize the risk of harm to the participants, the participants were told that their identity will be protected by changing their real names to pseudonyms. They were also assured that it will not be held against them if they decided to drop out, anytime during the study. However, the participants willingly participated in the interviews, without showing any fear of exposure or reprimand from their families.

Although, a series of questions had been developed from the literature addressing possible issues derived from the research questions, the interviews were semi-structured. I had prepared some interview questions of a demographic nature, for the participants and
their teacher to get a general idea of the environment in which the participating women lived and functioned, for example the question I asked the participants about their daily routine.

Some of the women were more comfortable speaking Punjabi than Urdu. I speak both languages without difficulty, therefore, I did not have any problems translating and transcribing the interviews. The translations were spot-checked for authenticity of the participants’ views as expressed in translation. Spot-checking was done by a person in Lahore who is Punjabi-Urdu-English trilingual as well as familiar with the environment of the participants. This person was not paid any fee for spot-checking.

**Interview Questions**

Table II shows the interview questions that had been developed from the literature review for the research questions. It is important to keep in mind that while I realized that all of the questions might not get asked or even be answered. Yet as a researcher, I recognized that I must be prepared to attempt to find answers for as many as possible. However, at times the flow of the conversation answered questions in a natural context or provided new ideas and themes not anticipated. Depending on the themes that emerged from the interviews, some of the questions also served to frame the analysis of the data.

Maxwell (2005) contends that some questions that might not seem logical may take the participants off-guard and encourage them to talk about their personal experiences. Maxwell (2005) emphasizes the value of asking “real questions” ones to which the researcher is genuinely interested in the answer, rather than contrived questions designed to elicit particular sorts of data. Doing this creates a more symmetrical and
Table 2

*Research Questions, Excerpts from Literature Review, and Interview/Analysis Questions*

| Research Question 1: What major factors determine women’s access to education? |
| Research Question 2: What major barriers do women encounter in their quest for education? |

**Current Educational and Emancipation Status of Women:**

**Facilitative and Obstructive Factors**

The fact is that the care-taking role of the woman has suffered the most negative consequences in the demise of the extended family since her role within the family has been severely stretched. Insofar as women in highly patriarchal settings receive less schooling and are isolated from modernizing influences, their orientation toward fertility is likely to remain more traditional than men’s resulting in a higher demand for fertility limitation among men than among women.

An investment in schooling for boys tends to have much larger economic payoffs than an investment for girls. Moreover, exposure of girls to new ideas and social contacts beyond the confines of the household can threaten to undermine the very basis of sexual and ideological control of women by their families.

In countries with low level of development, motherhood is construed as not even requiring literacy.

Changes in technology which have rendered industrial and service work less dependent on physical strength, hence the increasing incorporation of women to acquire greater levels of education in order to increase their competitiveness vis-a-vis others in the labor pool. In fact because of the existing ideologies about women’s inferiority, women would have to obtain more education and competence than men in order to compete on equal footing.

There is a popular belief that education serves social and economic mobility, and hence gender equity.

The school system does not offer knowledge that challenges the sexual division of labor or gender ideologies.

The school system does not offer knowledge that challenges the sexual division of labor or gender ideologies.

1. Who takes care of the children when you are at the NGO center?
2. Who takes care of the children when you are at work?
3. Could you tell me about your life in the extended family?
4. How is it different now that you are living separate from your extended family?
5. How has it affected your time and duties at home?
6. How has it affected the time and duties of your husband at home?
7. How do your in-laws manage living separate from you?
8. How important is it for you to have a son?
9. Why do you think the society puts so much emphasis on having a son?
10. How do you feel, as a woman, about this importance of sons, in your family?
11. Who makes decisions about the number of children to have in your family?
12. How much education do your brothers have?
13. Did you attend any formal schooling?
14. If the participant did not attend formal schooling, the researcher will ask why she did not go to a formal school.
15. How important do you think education is for women? How much education?
16. How important is education for women who stay home and take care of their homes and children?
17. How is it helpful to those who work outside the home?
18. How has the introduction of greater technology affected conditions for you at work, in relation to men?
19. What do you feel about the popular belief that education serves social and economic mobility, and hence gender equity, within the patriarchal system of Pakistan?  
(Specific question for the teachers/director of the NFE classes)
20. (If the participant had some formal schooling, the researcher would ask this question)  
What kind of things you learn about girls and women; what their roles are in the society and the work place?

 Violence

The lack of commitment to protect women from rape and the preoccupation with women’s sexual conduct is underpinned by traditional gender categories that constitute women as repositories of honor. Controlling women’s sexuality is a central debate in traditional patriarchal societies and seen as a fundamental prerequisite to creating an orderly and well-functioning society.

21. How is your life affected if your husband, father, or brother is unemployed?
22. How is your life affected if you are employed and your father, husband or brother is unemployed?
23. How do you feel about violence against women?
24. What does Islam say about violence against women?
25. How did you learn about these Islamic teachings?
26. What do you think about honor killings?
Women’s Lack of Physical Mobility: Implications for Education and Employment

In patriarchal societies, women’s inability to move not only affects their employment opportunities, it also affects their training and educational opportunities. As a consequence, they are dependent on others, usually men, for establishing links with the outside world, with the result that men are able to exercise control over women’s lives and labor, and even to exploit them.

45. How would you feel if you could stay home and not work outside the home?
46. How would you feel if you could work from home and not have to go out to work?
47. If you work from home who acts as a contact person between you and the people you work for?
48. How well do you feel your interests are represented by that person?
49. If you are unable to leave your home or your community to work, how do you think it affects your job and wage situation?

Patriarchal Bargaining

The desexualization of workplace relations by recasting strangers as kin, such as chacha and bhai workers and families mediate the contradictory ways in which Islamic prescriptions and practices confront the need or desire for employment. In so doing, they contest both Islamic discourses that constrain women and discourses about modern, immodest women who work outside the home.

50. How do the men at the work place feel about your working there?
51. How do you deal with the problems that you might face, if the men don’t like you working there?
52. How do you deal with your parents or your husband, if they object to your working along with men that are not related to you?
53. How do other women, such as your mother-in-law or other women in the community, who do not come to the NFE center feel about your involvement with it?
54. If they didn’t like your involvement with NFE, how would you handle it?
55. How would you deal with the men in your family or the community if they did not want you to enroll in the NFE projects?
**Purdah**

The homogeneous interpretation of burka as signifying female modesty and decorum as well as women’s subjugation disempowers women by ignoring the varied meanings that the burka may hold as well as disregarding how they construct or contest power struggles that center on veiling. As Ahmed (1992) so effectively argues, there are practical reasons for adopting Islamic dress: to affirm religious and social customs, to save the cost of acquiring expensive and fashionable clothes, and to protect oneself from harassment, as women who wear burka can talk and meet men in social spaces without the fear of being dubbed immoral. These are strategic choices that women make to redefine public space in ways that accommodate their needs.

56. How do you feel about purdah?
57. How do you feel when you go out wearing a burka or veil?
58. How does purdah affect your situation at the workplace?

**Market: Impact on Women’s Literacy and Emancipation**

When households have to reduce food consumption, women and girls have been witnessed consuming less food than men and boys. Similarly, when user charges are introduced or increased for education and healthcare, the access of women and the girl child to these services is affected.

What is regarded as ‘increased efficiency’ is often the transfer of cost from the paid economy to the unpaid work of women within the household (the unpaid economy) as seen in the cost of caring for the young, the elderly and the sick.

59. At meal times who gets to eat first?
60. If there is not enough food for everybody, then how do you manage?
61. What happens if there is not enough money to send all the children to school?
62. How do you feel if the brothers get more discriminatory treatment than you?

63. Could you tell me what happens when the men in your family leave the village to work in the city?
### Women’s Access to Land and Other Resources

In many parts of the developing world, women seldom hold rights to land in their own name. Their situation becomes critical when they are widowed or divorced and their needs correspondingly are more acute. It is particularly serious where divorce is easy for men, where polygamy is strictly a male privilege and the presence of a second wife reduces the amount of land or income allocated to the first. But the problem affects not only widowed, divorced or abandoned and single women; it also concerns those whose husbands and other male family members have migrated in search of cash employment.

64. What are your thoughts about divorce?
65. What does Islam say about the share of women in the inheritance of property?
66. Could you tell me what happens when the men in your family leave the village to work in the city?
67. If you don’t get a share in the property how do you manage when you are on your own?

### Women and Urban Migration

Women migrants to the cities frequently seek work in garment manufacturing, the showcase of export-oriented industrialization in Bangladesh. The encroachment of these “garment girls” on conveniently male social and economic spaces has generated widespread anxiety. By their very visibility, factory workers articulate both fears of unregulated sexuality and the threat of the usurpation of male economic roles.

68. How is your life affected if your husband, father, or brother is unemployed?
69. How is your life affected if you are employed and your father, husband or brother is unemployed?

### State Intervention: Implications for Women’s Literacy and Emancipation

The state plans as though men support families when in reality it is men together with women who do so, and frequently it is women who do so alone. The bulk of the resources are allocated (in most but not all countries of the region) without any attention to women.

70. Have you had any experience with any government programs that provide support and education for women?
71. How helpful was it?
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>How much, in your opinion should be the government’s involvement in the NFE programs?</td>
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<tr>
<td>73</td>
<td>How do the government’s policies regarding women’s NFE reflect the broader patriarchal outlook? Such as the assumption that most households are headed and supported by men? (Specific question for the teachers/director)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>Can you tell me what Islam says about women?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>What does it say about the status of men and women?</td>
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**Religion**

The tenacity of patriarchal family codes has been attributed in part to the patriarchal bias in the *sharia* (Islamic law) and in part to the prevalence of a sense of insecurity and emasculation among many men as a result of economic and political disempowerment under the impact of authoritarian modernization and globalization. Control over women and children within the family remains the last bastion of assertion of masculinity and power.

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<td>76</td>
<td>Can you tell me what Islam says about women?</td>
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<td>77</td>
<td>What does it say about the status of men and women?</td>
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Research Question 3: What are the major educational needs of these women - as they see them?

**Non-formal Education and NGOs: Possibilities for Lower SES Women in Developing Countries**

**NGO Project Design: Supports and Constraints**

Ross, (1987) stresses two questions – what will education do for women? And what will women do with education? - are crucial when designing programs for women’s education. Kelly, (1999) goes on to explain that women’s education is greatly affected by the opportunities for women to obtain gainful employment once they have been schooled.

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<td>78</td>
<td>How do you feel about your NFE classes?</td>
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<tr>
<td>79</td>
<td>How far are you involved in managing the project once it has been established by the NGO?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>Do you know any women who want to get involved with NFE projects and classes but are unable to do so?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81</td>
<td>What do you think are the reasons for their not being able to get involved?</td>
</tr>
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The Process of Empowerment

If the NGO is not simply to perpetuate the old dependence in new clothing, selected members of the group will need to be trained to take on management responsibilities and establish support networks. Such as training as bookkeepers, or quality-control technicians.

Edwards (2000) raises the question; what is the best way for non-governmental organizations to make a lasting impact on poverty? The basic premise is to reduce the burden of work on girls and women, as well as financial constraints on the parents, thus creating opportunities for women’s autonomy and education.

Baily (2009) contends that the increased economic viability of the entire village as a result of the infrastructure improvements and the investments in the education of the younger members of the community shows another level of transformation that has not been highlighted as specifically in previous research.

82. How does it affect the opinions of the men when your involvement in the NFE projects results in improvements in the community, at large?
83. How does it affect the opinion of the women in the community who did not approve of your involvement in the NFE projects?
84. What would you want for your daughters, in terms of education?

NGOs and Islamist Resistance

NGOs, especially those with foreign affiliations have been the sustained target of Islamist rhetoric. But there now appears to be a much more concerted effort to galvanize opposition against NGOs in the name of Islam and of protecting women. Conjuring at once threats to Islam as well as to the established order, NGOs are condemned as “anti-Islamic, anti-state and anti-people”.

85. Have you had any problems from the people who might not like women coming to the NFE classes? (Specific question for the teachers/director of the NGO)
collaborative relationships in which participants are able to bring their own knowledge to bear on the questions in ways that the researcher might never have anticipated.

I had prepared the interview questions keeping in mind my literature review and research questions. I was aware that it would not be possible to ask all the questions, but I didn’t want to be caught off guard for any kind of situation which might arise. Therefore, I tried to prepare myself beforehand, as much as I possibly could.

As it turned out, during the actual interviews, some questions were not suitable for the circumstances of the participants, such as the questions about work place were not appropriate, as none of the participants worked outside the home. Similarly, after I had asked them if they had read the Quran with Urdu translation, and their answer was in the negative, questions about religion and the women’s status in the religion were not feasible. The women didn’t understand Arabic and they hadn’t read the Urdu translation; hence, they couldn’t have known what the Quran says about women, their rights and their status. On the other hand, I had not prepared any questions for some of the information, which the participants divulged. For example, it had not occurred to me to think on the lines that cultures can change when necessity compels. Some of the participants told that they had to go out of the home and take care of the errands, either because the male members of the family were busy with their business or the participant was the oldest sibling and the brothers were too young to run any errands. As Maxwell (2005) posits participants are able to bring their own knowledge to bear on the interviews in ways that the researcher might never have anticipated.
Memos

Hatch (2002) and Maxwell (2005) posit that memos are a vital technique to develop your own ideas. Therefore, memos for this study include observations as well as reflections on the researcher’s ideas about the data collected during interviews. Memos can be written on any problems encountered during the research process, whether with design, setting or data. Most importantly, memos are crucial when the researcher has an idea that he or she wants to develop further.

Even as the researcher immerses herself in the data, she must be honest and vigilant about her own perspective, preexisting thoughts and beliefs, and developing hypotheses. Qualitative researchers engage in the self-reflective process of “bracketing” whereby they recognize and set aside (but do not discard) their a priori knowledge and assumptions, with the analytic goal of attending to the participants’ accounts with an open mind. The example of hearsay about Nasima’s husband, regarding my bracketing is given above.

The use of the memos is particularly helpful in understanding a researcher’s values and expectations that might influence the conduct and conclusions of the study (which may be either positive or negative) and avoiding negative consequences (Creswell & Miller, 2002; Maxwell, 2005; Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

Categorizing Strategies/Substantive Categories: Open Coding

This study used categories that were inductively developed through an “open coding” of the data, emerging from the participant’s own descriptions and concepts (Creswell & Miller, 2002; Creswell, 2008; Maxwell, 2005).
Connecting strategies: axial coding. Connecting strategies or patterns were sought. These strategies come in several forms - similarity (things happen the same way), difference (they happen in predictably different ways), frequency (they happen often or seldom), sequence (they happen in a certain order), correspondence (they happen in relation to other activities or events), and causation (one appears to cause another) (Creswell & Miller, 2002; Creswell, 2008; Hatch, 2002; Maxwell, 2005).

I coded the data as soon as possible, after I had transcribed the interview. As I started to get additional data from the interviews, I would make comparisons – look for similarities and differences, as well as connections between phenomena and recode. Once, I had all the data, I looked for a framework for analysis of the data. One of my research questions was to discover what women wanted from education and what education can do for them. I had anticipated and heard in the interviews that education can give women some confidence, so that they could have some share in the decision-making processes, within their families. Thinking on those lines, I found a fit with Seeberg’s empowerment capabilities approach (2011).

Data Analysis

Data analysis went on along with data collection. The data analysis consisted of (1) memos, (2) categorizing strategies (Such as coding) and (3) connecting strategies (such as narrative analysis) (Hatch, 2002; Maxwell, 2005. Seeberg’s (2011) empowerment capabilities approach was chosen for analysis. This analytical framework is based on Sen’s (1999); Kabeer’s (1999); Nussbaum’s (2000) and Unterhalter’s (2007) human development and capabilities approach.
The capabilities approach develops understanding of global development beyond the popular economic gross domestic product approach. For Sen (1992, 1999), participation in the educational process promotes ‘capabilities’ and ‘personal flourishing’ which symbolize collective human development and socially just change. The human development and capabilities approach recognizes education as consisting of a process, action and an outcome, all of which center on empowerment (Kabeer, 1999). Empowerment here is perceived as an individual process with collective consequences, so that the concept of opportunity structure is embedded within it rather than a measurable substitute for it.

Sen (1999) suggests that the ‘condition of being educated’ or a girl’s ‘capability’ is demarcated by her experiences and her capacity to imagine. Hence her ‘condition of being educated’ consists of what a girls has ‘reason to value’. These values are not intended to be analyzed from a perspective of equal rights or what would be just, but rather from the perspective of heightened ‘substantive freedom to achieve alternative functioning combinations or … various lifestyles (p. 75) For Sen (1999) enhancing an individual’s capabilities, a function of schooling, is enhancing her ‘freedom to achieve: the alternative functioning combinations from which the person can choose’ (p. 75)

Nussbaum’s (2000) approach to capabilities is slightly different from Sen (1999); in that basic rights and capabilities are necessary, complementary concepts. Some fundamental rights have to be stressed to prevent the worst exploitation. Unterhalter’s (2007) perspective does not insist on equal rights, it rather emphasizes that opportunities to achieve valued capabilities; it is a more functional demand for resource allocation or
policy. It takes into consideration the participant for whom policy is addressed by providing her the opportunities to achieve valued functions.

The capabilities approach focuses on the subjective sphere of empowerment, and in that sphere it highlights agency or source of action, within restraining opportunities and possibilities. For Sen (1999) the freedom to learn and the condition of being educated are both capabilities that an individual has reason to value – irrespective of getting a certificate. For Nussbaum (2000), achieving parity with boys might be a girl’s right but in itself might not be a benefit to her or any social benefit. Essentially, Nussbaum stresses that a relativistic view of empowerment must be a basic premise of human rights and social justice, and political policies must be able to ‘deliver to citizens a certain basic level of capability’ (p. 71). The central concepts of the empowerment capabilities framework are based on those that Sen (1999) developed in his book *Development as Freedom*.

**Summary**

This study was conducted using qualitative research founded on interpretive approach and the methodology consisted of semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and memos of observations of literacy classes, as well as secondary data from research findings by other scholars and international documents, e.g. UNESCO. To organize the categories found in the coding of the data, I used Seeberg’s empowerment capabilities framework for analysis of the data. Empowerment here is perceived as an individual process with collective consequences, so that the concept of opportunity structure is embedded within it rather than a measurable substitute for it.
The questions that the study attempted to address centered on what factors and issues did the participants describe as facilitating or obstructive in access to education, for example, accessibility, socio-economic or political issues, or gender. The questions were:

1. What are the facilitating factors for lower SES women in Pakistan to enroll and continue in NFE programs?
2. What are the obstructive factors to enroll and continue in NFE programs?
3. What are the educational needs of these women - as they see them?

For validity, I relied upon the self-reflective process of “bracketing” whereby I could recognize and set aside (but do not discard) my prior knowledge and assumptions, with the objective of attending to the participants’ accounts with an open mind. Focus group with the teacher, the literacy coordinator and the ‘mobilizer’ of the NGO as well as field notes were also ways of seeking validity.

The themes and patterns that were generated were compared to the existing empirical literature on women from lower socio-economic strata. This helped provide a clearer picture of women’s education – the avenues that had already been explored and any new concepts and issues that might have surfaced from this study.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Illiteracy is a manifestation of the unequal distribution of power and resources in society and the historical cultural ideologies that undergird it. For those groups that find that they are missing out on the benefits of both modernization and democratization – particularly rural populations, ethnic minorities, and women – literacy constitutes an essential tool in their efforts to gain legal and socioeconomic rights. Except for a few countries, women have lower levels of literacy than men. In developing countries this disparity is even greater. EFA vowed to provide quality education for girls and eliminate gender disparities, in Pakistan, by 2015. But what it does not address is why education is important and what kind of education, for the girls and women for whom literacy projects are intended? This question was what initiated the research for my dissertation, as the women who are targeted for literacy programs; their voices are hardly ever heard. The empowerment capabilities approach was helpful in recognizing what the women valued and why; concerning their education and how what they valued affected their well-being. The women in the process of becoming empowered, however precarious that state of empowerment was had changed their relationships to those around them and their environment. Seeberg’s (2011) framework has been useful in analyzing the underlying forces and the processes - the socio-cultural and economic issues that interact with the women’s capabilities to produce agency freedom.
Well-being

The first dimension, wellbeing, is described as affective and cognitive processes of self-expression and self-reflection which are intrinsic to education. It has cognitive, psychological, economic, and political aspects. Some of the themes underlying this dimension are: enjoyment of learning and playfulness associated with learning, growing confidence and self-respect, growing ability to develop insight and patience to reason things out, greater curiosity about the larger world (Seeberg, 2011).

Enjoyment

My observations of the literacy sessions, discussions with the teacher, and interviews with the women revealed that women’s enjoyment was not just limited to the lessons but to their socializing as well, “I come here; learn something useful and talk to the women too” (Munira, a widow 50 to 60 years old). The teacher explained that she gives the women 10 or 15 minutes to chat amongst themselves, so that they can relax a little because when they arrive they are generally quite stressed from the problems that they encounter in their households.

The women were quite enthusiastic about their lessons and enjoyed their learning sessions. It appeared that the women were also cognizant of the fact that as women, they were faced with certain constraints, in their quest for education, and they could best deal with them if they stuck together and helped each other. Noreen (a mother of five, 30 to 35 years old) used to bring her eight or nine months old child to the center. He had some stomach discomfort, and was irritable most of the time. None of the other women were
ever perturbed that the child was disrupting their work; rather they would offer advice to the mother on how to deal with him.

The teacher explained that sometimes the women would come during the evening to ask for help with something in their lesson that they couldn’t figure out. And when they missed a class, they wanted to make up for it.

When they (the women) started, they were very skeptical about how they’ll have to leave homes and spend so much time at the center, but now they feel so much responsibility for their education. When they practice their lessons at home, and their kids or parents feel proud of them, it makes these women very happy. They feel very proud of themselves. Now even if one of them says she won’t be coming; she has housework to take care of, the others tell her she has to come, if she does it will be a big help to her (Nida, the teacher, an unmarried woman, 20 to 22 years old).

**Confidence**

In spite of such constraints, as the chores left unfinished and criticism from their families, the women made it to the center. They had become confident enough to even reprimand their family members for not being literate. Samina (an unmarried woman, 15 to 18 years old) was telling Fazal Bibi (a grandmother, 50 to 60 years old) that her older brother, who had a new baby, had no idea what medicines the doctor had prescribed for the mother. Samina said, “I told him if he would learn to read he could read the prescription.”

When asked, why these women came to the center? Nida (the teacher) answered:
As far as unmarried girls are concerned, I talked to the mothers. I told them that they had not sent the girls to a formal school but now they have a chance to get education. You are going to get them married, and if they go to a far off place where you cannot help them, they wouldn’t have the “confidence” (In English) to talk to anyone.

As the quote indicates, Nida had thought that basic literacy would be useful in inculcating confidence in the women. The women themselves expressed that they had gained “confidence” and “sense.” “The women have gained confidence. They have learned some “sense” (In English). They have learned how to talk to people” (Samina, an unmarried woman, about 15 to 18). “We have gained “confidence” and “sense” as well by coming to the center” (Nasima, a young mother of 18 to 20).

My parents tell me, “Why do you want to study now, if you didn’t go to school when you were younger, but I tell them I want to study. My bhabi [brother’s wife] is in strong opposition to my leaving home. But I will keep coming. I have a great desire to get education. (Saadia, an unmarried woman, about 15 to 20)

…my devars [husband’s younger brothers] would laugh at me for studying at my age. “She should be embarrassed,” they say, “going out wearing joggers.” My devranis [husband’s younger brothers’ wives] said the same things. I told them that they should come with me, so they can learn something as well. (Noreen, a mother of five, about 30 to 35 years old)

Saadia and Noreen had both intended to keep coming to the center, in spite of discouragement from parents, disapproving bhabi, and devars and devranis. Their zeal for
learning had given Saadia and Noreen sufficient self-confidence to cross the hurdles that they were faced with.

Nida (the teacher) told the women that when she went to call Karima to the center, Karima’s mother-in-law started yelling at Nida that she was making the women waste their time, etc. Later, when Karima arrived she explained that she had lit the wood fire and kneaded the dough for roti (flat bread) and told the mother-in-law that she (Karima) would be back soon to make rotis. Karima had become confident enough to actually tackle the mother-in-law’s wrath, albeit tactfully, and come to the center. Almost all the other women had some kind of obstacles: disapproving mothers-in-law, jeering family members, or unfinished chores, yet they had plucked up enough courage to come to the center.

**Cognition: Reason Things Out**

The women expressed sentiments, such as, “Ever since the center has opened, I leave all the chores at home and come here. The chores never end, but if I let slip this opportunity I won’t get it again” (Samina, an unmarried woman of 15 to 20).

The women appeared cognizant, not only of their personal, domestic, and social issues but political issues as well.

I was married young, although I hadn’t wanted to get married, but my mother had died and my father didn’t want to take my responsibility, therefore he married me off without much attention to the man’s job and personality and what kind of family and home he had. (Nasima, a young mother of two)
The teacher sometimes discussed political issues, such as burning buses in protest for shortages of natural gas and electricity. Fazal Bibi said that burning the buses reduces the number of buses on the streets creating problems for girls who travel in buses for schools and colleges.

On the other hand, from the interviews, I concluded that some social issues, such as domestic violence had been internalized by these women as part of their lives. This internalized oppression is adopted as a survival mechanism, but becomes so well ingrained that the effects are mistaken for reality (Afshar, 1998).

When asked how their relationship was with their husbands, when there was all this stress of unemployment; Noreen (a mother of five, 30 to 35 years old) answered: “Daggers fly. (The women laugh) The husbands and wives have very fierce fights.”

“My son is very volatile, he doesn’t listen to anyone. He doesn’t respect his parents or his wife. We all just hunker down quietly in a corner, when he starts to yell and scream” (Fazal Bibi, a grandmother of 50 to 60 years old). “When the men are jobless, they are extremely stressed. They cannot obviously hit the parents, but they don’t hesitate to hit the wives” (Nida, the teacher). As Nida summed it up, the women had rationalized violence on the premise that the men are stressed; therefore, the women have to put up with the abuse. They did not express any conceptualization of the point that the men could find some other outlet for their frustration, rather than taking it out on the women. This mind-set might have been a result of long-established patriarchal social structures which render women as possessions and give men complete authority over women. This kind of male hegemony could lead to subjugation by violence (Bovarnick, 2007).
Though, this is what Farhan (a young man of about 20 to 25 years old, who worked for the NGO as a mobilizer) said, “In cases, where wives who have passed 6 or 8 grades and the men are completely illiterate, they (the women) frequently brag about their education in front of their husbands. The husbands retaliate by hitting the women.”

Apparently, if the women somehow neglect to placate the men’s ego, they suffer the consequences - in the form of violence. “It’s the wife who has to bear the brunt of the husband being unemployed. When there is stress the husband takes it out on the wife. This is very common among the inhabitants of this village (Nida; the teacher, about 20 to 22 years old).

**Curious about the Larger World**

Almost all of the women wanted to know where I lived when I came to Pakistan: What was America like? How did the women dress there? What kinds of homes did they have? Was life any different after 9/11? Fazal Bibi (a grandmother, 50 to 60 years old) said, “I want to be able to read the bill-boards displaying advertisements.” And this is what Karima (a young mother, about 20 to 25 years old) “… I want them (the children) to be able to study as much as they can. My husband and I are illiterate but we want our kids to be able to face the fast-moving world.”

Most families had cable television in their homes, except for those who could not afford the expense. The women would discuss the news or anything of interest that they had watched on the TV the evening before. This seemed to have played a part in raising awareness of the larger world, hence an awareness of the need for education for themselves and their children, to keep up with the demands of the fast-paced world.
Capacity to Aspire

Some women expressed their hopes as: “I couldn’t go to school but I want to study here at the center as much as I can” (Saadia, an unmarried woman of about 15 to 20 years old. “I can’t speak in Urdu (the women all laugh). I want to be able to speak like them (Samina and Nida) but no, I am still dumb” (they all laugh). Noreen (a mother of five, about 30 to 35 years old) “…I frequently go out of my home and when I see women who are educated, it makes me envious that I get well-educated and become like them and I don’t want to have any difficulty in studying anything and helping others in their education as well” (Samina, an unmarried woman about 15 to 20 years old). Noreen, (a mother of five, 30 to 35 years old) said:

Everybody tells me, ‘the girls are grown; when are you going to get them married.’ But I am going to educate my girls, get them some kind of vocational training, before I get them married. I have been making cow dung patties, all my life, but I don’t want that life for my daughters.

If they were allowed to work, they professed that they would want to make their parents as comfortable as possible. “In which (a job) I can take care of all my parents’ needs.” or give their children, the best of nutrition and education that they could: “I want to give both my boys good nutrition . . .” (Nasima, a young mother of about 20 to 22 years old). “The kids go to school. I want to be able to get education, and then get a” job” (Noreen, a mother of five, about 30 to 35 years old).

The married women whose husbands were unemployed, such as Noreen and Nasima were the ones who wanted to get a job, “If I can get education, I can get a “job”
(in English) and help my family” (Nasima, a young mother of 20 to 22 years old). “… I want to be able to read fluently, and be able to write my name, so that I can get a job. . .” (Noreen, a mother of five, about 30 to 35 years old). Karima, whose husband was earning good money did not express a wish to work outside of the home: “My brothers are younger than me; therefore I used to do all the chores outside of the home… Now that I am married, I do all the housework as well as sewing clothes. My husband earns good money.”

Choose Learning/Something Specific

This is what some of the women said about this category: “I already knew how to read but I couldn’t write that’s why I come to the center” (Aamna, a grandmother, about 40 to 50 years old). “I want to be able to help my kids with their homework, when they go to school, so it would be easier for my kids” (Karima, a young mother of about 20 to 25 years old). “I already knew how to write my name, but I wanted to learn some math” (Fazal Bibi, a grandmother of about 50 to 60 years old). “I want to get some education, so that I can fill the form for a job as a helper for the women who give polio drops to the children” (Noreen, a mother of five about 30 to 35 years old).

Most of the unmarried women were there because they had not been able to continue their education in formal schools. They expressed sentiments that indicated that they had the awareness that education was important for their well-being, although, they were not quite sure how. Samina (an unmarried woman, about 15 to 20 years old) said, “When I hear educated women talk, I want to be able to talk like them.” Noreen (a mother of five, about 30 to 35 years old) expressed a wish similar to the one Samina had.
Noreen said, “I want to be able to talk in Urdu, like Nida (the teacher) and Samina.” The native language of these women is Punjabi, a regional language, spoken in the province of Punjab, while Urdu is the national as well as official language, therefore believed to be a language of the educated.

The women valued education within the context of their families’ capabilities and their habitus. They did not perceive employment as the next step because they knew that their families and the socio-cultural milieu would not perceive that as an option. Moreover, material context or proximity to the NGO center was another factor that figured in their valuation of education. Distance from the center, among others, was one of the facilitating or obstreperous dynamics that featured in the discourse with the women. This was especially true for the unmarried women, as their movements were even more restricted. In culturally restrictive environments, adolescent girls may be viewed as morally suspect if they continue going to school. The importance of preserving a girl’s purity up to marriage leads to widespread withdrawal of girls from school at puberty (Mak, 1999; Qureshi & Rarieya 2007).

Summary

The women employed self-reflection during the interviews. They expressed a sense of enjoyment and appreciation for education, and gaining more confidence as they progressed through the literacy session. They aspired to continue building on their educational experiences, even after the literacy session ended, as well as to get the daughters educated, and even delaying marriage for them. They spoke of gaining confidence and reflected to have gained cognitive control.
Agency Freedom

The second dimension, agency freedom, is also an intrinsic facet of education with cognitive, psychological, economic, and political characteristics. Sen (1999) describes it as a freedom experienced in the educational process. It has extrinsic aspects as well, as is clear from the key capability attributed to it - decision making or choosing a functioning. The themes that could emerge from it are: choose learning, speaking up for self and making strategic life choices (Seeberg, 2011).

Choose Learning/Speak Up on Own Behalf/Make Strategic Life Choices

For these women choosing to learn was partly tied up with speaking up on their own behalf, as the act of coming to the center was a matter of speaking up in itself which conveyed the determination to make independent decisions, although to a limited extent.

Making decisions about choosing to work or for that matter decisions about marriage and divorce weighed heavily against their wish not to “dishonor” their parents or to displace their children by taking any steps that would upset the family values or their families’ standing in the socio-cultural milieu.

As far as speaking up for themselves, finding their voice in the family, this seemed to be related to age and maturity rather than schooling. Fazal Bibi who is a grandmother, 50 to 60 years old, said, “They (the family) would laugh and say that you are going to study at this age… I wanted to come and I said my daughter-in-law would come too.”

Noreen (a mother of five, about 30 to 35 years old) was also assertive in voicing her opinion: “She should be embarrassed”, they (the in-laws) say, ‘going out wearing
joggers.’ I told them that they should come with me, so they can learn something as well.”

Samina and Saadia were not married but they were quite emphatic, as far as their education is concerned. “My brothers and bhabis say, ‘you are only going to do housework; you don’t need education for that,’ I tell them education is very important… They were not letting me come today but I came without telling anyone” (Samina, an unmarried woman of about 15 to 20 years old). Saadia said:

My parents say, “why do you want to study now, if you didn’t go to school when you were younger,” but I tell them I want to study. My bhabi [brother’s wife] is in strong opposition to my leaving home. But I will keep coming. (Saadia; an unmarried woman, about 15 to 20 years old)

On the other hand, Basheera and Zohra were younger, about 14 or 15 years old. They were both relatively timid and docile. They were coming to the center because Nida (the teacher) had convinced the parents to send them.

Religion. The literature review chapter has quite a few references to religion and its bearing on the lives of the women. Religion is a vital part of the participating women’s lives, in the sense that they pray every day and recite verses from the Quran which they had memorized. Mostly, it’s the religious rituals that they follow, in their daily routine. For example, Noreen (a mother of five, 30 to 35 years old) said she found some parts of the literacy lessons difficult to follow. She was advised by Samina (an unmarried woman, 15 to 18 years old) to recite, “O Allah, increase my knowledge” (in Arabic). Noreen said she had been reciting it, but didn’t say whether it helped or not. Yet when I asked if the
women should be consulted by their parents when making decisions about their marriages; they all consistently declared that this decision was not for them to make, although religion does give them the right to their opinion. This example highlights the phenomenon that they formed their opinions about their rights and conduct according to the sociocultural traditions, instead. It explains how religion did not come up too frequently, except as rituals, in their conversations.

**Marriage.** When it came to marriage, the most important step in these women’s lives, they unanimously declared that they would leave the decision to their parents. The subjects of both marriage and divorce are rather complex ones. They are closely related to the issue of women’s sexed subjectivity. D. Kandiyoti and A. Kandiyoti, (1987) describe sexed subjectivity as the mode of control of female sexuality; this practice of segregation has a direct bearing on how gender is internalized. Corporate control, over female sexuality, becomes strikingly evident in the large number of different individuals who see themselves as immediately responsible for ensuring women’s appropriate sexual conduct. Parents, siblings, near and distant relatives and even neighbors closely monitor the movements of the postpubescent girl, firmly imprinting the notion that her sexuality is not hers to give or withhold.

A central consequence of corporate control over female sexuality, in this context, is the close connection between female sexual purity and family or lineage honor. Women are vested with immense negative power because any misbehavior, on their part, can bring shame and dishonor to the male members of the community. Strict external constraints are placed on women, which may range from total seclusion and veiling to
severe restrictions of their movements and their access to public places (Feldman, 2001; D. Kandiyoti, and A. Kandiyoti, 1987).

When I asked Samina (An unmarried woman, about 15 to 20 years old) if she would want her parents to consult with her, before getting her married, she seemed a bit ambivalent about her response, but Munira (a widow, about 50 to 60 years old) did not hesitate to state:

No, it’s not our in our culture to ask a girl’s view about her marriage. The parents decide what’s best for their daughters. A daughter never says she wants to marry someone else. If a girl ever says that her whole family is humiliated, nobody wants to associate with them.

This is what Karima (a young mother, about 20 to 25 years) said, “Love marriages exist in the cities. In rural areas parents arrange the marriages and the girls accept them.”

Nida (the teacher) summed it up as:

I believe that the parents should ask, but the girls should give in to their parents’ wishes, because if there are problems in a marriage, the parents are willing to help the daughter, otherwise they don’t want to get involved.

In terms of their opinion about their marriage, the women appeared to have rationalized that if they were to voice disapproval about their prospective mate, it would mean that they were involved with someone other than the person that the parents had chosen for them and this state of affairs was not acceptable at all. They believed that the parents wanted the best for them; therefore they would not make a bad decision. Jalila (an
unmarried woman of about 15 to 18 years old) said, “Our parents will decide what’s best for us. They will not find someone who’s not good.”

When asked about an appropriate age for girls to marry, all the women agreed that it should be above 20. But as for voicing their opinion, in front of their parents, Nida (the teacher) said, “These things can only be said jokingly, if you are serious, the atmosphere, suddenly changes from light to ominous.”

**Divorce.** The women in troubled marriages: Aamna (a grandmother, about 40 to 50 years old), Nasima (a young mother) and Noreen (a mother of five, about 30 to 35 years old) said, “My kids will blame me for messing up their lives. My life is already ruined; I don’t want to mess up my kids’ lives” (Aamna). “Sometimes I think I should leave him and go to my parents’ home, but then I think of my children; they won’t have a father. Now I want to work hard for my kids, so that I can get them educated” (Nasima). Noreen gave following rationalization for her decision to stay in the marriage:

The other day my mother-in-law had a fight with me and told me to leave. I told her if I were alone I would have left, but now I have three daughters; I don’t want to mess up their lives. I know nobody is going to take care of my daughters, if I leave.

The decision to stay in tough marriages seemed to rest on two fundamentals, both of which involved the well-being of children: one was shelter and the second having a father figure. Although Nida (the teacher) said that, “In rural areas, divorce is a source of huge shame. And eventually, it’s the woman who gets blamed for the break up.”
Spinsterhood. This is how Noreen (a mother of five, about 30 to 35 years old) perceived an unmarried woman, “… People say ‘why is that girl not married there must be something wrong with her. Nobody asked for her. There was no proposal for her.’

Those women who don’t get married for one reason or another are obligated to live with their parents if the parents are alive or with the brothers, if the parents have passed away, as for a woman to be living alone is frowned upon by neighbors and relatives. “If they don’t have any property they have to depend on their brothers or sisters or some relatives… These women work 10% harder than the other women because they know they don’t have any other option” (Farhan, an NGO staff member, about 20 to 22 years old). Nida (the teacher) volunteered the following information:

They feel that if they get education and work they can get respect from their brothers or not be considered a burden. If they bring in some income, the brothers won’t turn them out of their homes. If they don’t have a job, they do all the housework, so that the brother and his wife would let them stay with them… But their life is not worth much. They just plow through life, without any purpose.

Being married gives a woman a higher status in society, which a divorced woman, a spinster or a widow would not have. They cannot look forward to a future surrounded by subservient daughters-in-law. This may represent genuine personal tragedy, since these women do not have the option of attaining independence, as the married women can, once they have escaped the control of mothers-in-law (Kandiyote, 1988).
Mak (1996); Hoodbhoy (1998) and Stromquist (1990) posit that some of the factors which contribute to the low female attendance rate in schools are interrelated to the sociocultural issues. These include:

1. Greater opportunity costs of educating girls (Girls are considered more useful than boys in the home). “My mom died, when I was very young … and the whole responsibility of the home was on me, so I had to drop out of school.” (Nasima, a young mother of two)

2. Concerns over safety en route to school. Nida (the teacher) explained about a girl Zohra (an unmarried woman, 15 to 18 years old). “Her brothers wouldn’t allow her to go to school. They said the environment is not conducive for a young girl to leave home.”

3. Traditions of female seclusion. Zohra, when asked if her brothers went to school answered, “No. None of them are educated, that’s why they won’t let me get education. They think if girls leave home and get education they will get immoral.”

4. Poverty, “No I didn’t go. (to school) The family didn’t send me to school. There wasn’t enough money” (Jalila, an unmarried woman, about 15 to 18).

5. Boy-preference, “We didn’t have enough money, so we focused on our so.” (Fazal Bibi, a grandmother of about sixty)

6. Norms about the appropriate role of women, i.e., being married and having children discourage parents from investing significantly, in the education of their daughters. Basheera (an unmarried girl of about 15 or 16) explained that
her parents said, “...what are you going to do with your education, now? (Meaning if you didn’t go to formal school), just stay at home and take care of the chores.”

Related to the problem of women’s sexed subjectivity is the problem of family honor and lineage. Feldman (2001), D. Kandiyoti and A. Kandiyoti (1987) state that women are vested with immense negative power; because any misbehavior, on their part, can bring shame and dishonor to the male members of the community. Strict external constraints are placed on women, which may range from total seclusion and veiling to severe restrictions of their movements and their access to public places. These external constraints directly affect the women’s access to education. This is what Zarina (an unmarried woman, about 15 to 20 years old) said, “None of them (the brothers) are educated, that’s why they won’t let me get education. They think if girls leave home and get education they will get immoral.”

As for veiling, as a measure of seclusion, it was not how these women saw it. When asked why they kept their heads and bodies covered with the chadar [chador]; they said that it’s just a habit. Their mothers and grandmothers did the same. Purdah or veiling cannot be homogeneously interpreted as subjugating or suppressing women (Z. Ahmed, 1984; Feldman, 2001). There are practical reasons for adopting purdah: to affirm religious and social customs and to protect oneself from harassment, as women who wear burka can talk and meet men in social spaces without the fear of being dubbed immoral. The participating women also said that purdah protects them from unwanted attention from men, when the women have to leave home.
School participation and attainment by girls in developing countries shows that family decisions are powerful determinants of the probability that daughters will enroll, attend, and continue in school. Stromquist (1990) argues that it has been observed that parents assign girls more domestic responsibilities than they do to boys. In the case of poor households, girls represent important labor that the family cannot forego by allowing them to go to school. Thus, even if schools are available and girls enroll, patterns of girls’ poor attendance leading to dropping out tend to emerge.

All the unmarried women said that their parents or brothers and bhabis objected to their coming to the center on the premise that the women would be doing household chores and raising children, tasks which can be passed on orally, thus they do not, in effect, require literacy (Stromquist, 1990).

During one of the lessons, Nida (the teacher) asked the women why Basheera was not there, and the women replied that her khala [mother’s sister] was upset about her going to the center. She believed that Quranic education was enough for her. But Basheera did arrive a little later. Not long after, the khala also arrived and stood there, with her hands on her hips, keeping a close watch on Basheera.

Nida later explained:

Basheera has five sisters. Her nani [maternal grandmother] had educated her older sister as well, and then sent her back to her mother. Now she (Nani) has brought Basheera to her home so that she can get her educated… Her Nani says she will do whatever she can to make the girls’ life better. Therefore, she brings the girls
to her home, one by one, gets them educated and sends them back to their parents’ home.

The Nani herself is not literate, but she is determined to get her granddaughters educated. Yet she did not see a future for these girls in which they would be earning a living, as she said, during my informal discussion with her, when she came to pick up Basheera, “I wish he (Basheera’s brother) were older. Then he could have shared the parents’ burden.” Basheera’s brother is younger than the sisters and was three years old in 2011, when I carried out the study. Within the dictates of the patriarchal system, it is the brother who is obligated to support the family, if the father is not capable of carrying the burden alone, while women in the household carry out their duties within the confines of the home. Hence, Basheera and her sisters cannot leave home, to find work and support the family.

My oldest brother died, and my mom used to be sick a lot, so my dad didn’t allow me to continue school…Outside the home, my bhabis [brothers’ wives] have chores, such as hospital for their children or shopping for home and their personal things. I am the one who does all these chores that’s why my brothers and their wives don’t want me to study… (Samina, an unmarried woman, about 15 to 20 years old)

This is contrary to the traditional patriarchal norm dictating that women stay within the confines of the home; yet necessity compelled this woman to leave home and the family was obliged to relent to the circumstance, as well. Samina has two brothers but they are busy at the tea shop that they run, and her sister’s-in-law are not confident
enough to run all the errands. Similarly, Karima (a young mother of two) explained, “My brothers are younger than me. Therefore, when my parents died, I used to do all the chores outside of the home.” Here Sen’s (1999) argument that culture’s change when necessity compels, seems to be quite appropriate.

Nasima (a young mother) said:

My husband studied till 8th grade. My mom had died and the whole responsibility of the home was on me, so I had to drop out of school. Older sisters were married. I wanted to get education, so my husband encouraged me to come to the center.…

My husband says I can study as much as I want.

Contrary to Samina and Karima, Nasima had to drop out of school to take care of family responsibilities. In her case it was the husband who was the support behind her enthusiasm for education.

Some women came to the center under compulsion of some kind of employment, such as Fazal Bibi, Noreen and Nasima. Others, such as Karima and Farzana, the two young mothers came because they wanted to help out their children with their homework. The circumstance that had compelled the unmarried girls to come was that they had to drop out of formal school or were not able to go, at all.

Nonetheless, the daughters and granddaughters of the women were going to school regardless of opportunity costs for educating them, poverty or boy-preference. This is what Noreen (a mother of five, about 30 to 35 years old) said, “… They go to school and take care of all the housework, as well. My oldest daughter is in 9th grade. I have three daughters. They don’t let me do anything…”
On the other hand:

My daughter is in third year of college and she is also learning to sew. My older daughter is married. I come to the center and then finish my chores when I go home. I don’t let my daughter do any housework. I just want her to study. I did the same with my older daughter. (Aamna, a grandmother, about 40 to 50 years old)

My niece’s (brother’s daughter) school is at some distance from home; therefore the family has some problems taking her there, so she misses some days of school. My father (the girl’s grandfather) said he will take her to school himself if he has to, but she will not miss school… (Saadia, an unmarried woman, about 15 to 20 years old)

Mak (1996); Qureshi and Rarieya (2007) posit that early marriage is also one of the deterrents, among others, in women’s literacy. Early marriage is one of the ways to ensure the girls’ purity till marriage. All the married women said that they had gotten married at 15 to 17 years of age.

Summary

The women did express agency in the decision they made to come to the center, despite disapproval from their families, as well as decision to stay in their marriages, even though they had problems. Their close ties with their families would not allow, most women, to seek employment or get involved in decisions about their prospective marriages. The women whose husbands were not employed had come to the literacy center hoping that education would be a ticket to employment. But the woman whose
husband was employed and making good money did not express a desire to work. She was there, so that she could help her children with their homework.

**Achievement of Capabilities**

The third and final dimension of empowerment – achievement of capabilities or aspirations that they have reason to value – consists of three topics of capabilities. The first describes the political state or condition of a person within a structure and the instrumental value of education. This includes themes – such as, participation in the distribution of resources in the family and community. This theme is embedded in the community, in constraints and supports for schooling. The second topic is both an intrinsic and an instrumental facet of education. It involves the ability to imagine social change for self and others, taking on a re-gendered role, a raised level of social consciousness - for example, objecting to male dominance/preference and generally to family role pressures. The third topic of capabilities is the objective state or condition, and the instrumental outcome of education (Seeberg, 2011).

**Political Sate or Condition**

The young mothers and the unmarried women whose families didn’t have adequate funds when they were growing up said that their parents had chosen to send the brothers to school. They had stated it in quite a matter of fact manner, as if boy-preference was an accepted fact of life for them. Of the women who had to drop out of school, none of them told that they protested or begged their parents to let them stay in school. Saadia (an unmarried woman, 15 to 20 years old) did say she begged her brothers to teach her what they learned in school, but even she did not tell that she begged her
parents to send her to school. In this context, it is well to remember Sen’s (1999) words that achievement of aspirations depends on what the person has reason to value. Family values are what these women valued, and they aspired within that structure of family and community constraints.

**Subjective Positionality or Orientation**

The subordination of women to male members of the family and women’s unequal status in society, in general, are constraints on female emancipation and education (Mak (1996); Qureshi & Rarieya (2007). “Her fiancé thinks Basheera will become independent and wouldn’t give her husband the due respect. This is a general belief among men” (Nida, the teacher).

D. Kandiyoti and A. Kandiyoti (1987) postulate that Corporate control over female sexuality becomes strikingly evident in the large number of different individuals who see themselves as immediately responsible for ensuring women’s appropriate sexual conduct. Parents, siblings, near and distant relatives, and even neighbors closely monitor the movements of the postpubescent girl; firmly imprinting the notion that her sexuality is not hers to give or withhold.

My Dad trusts me so much that he even lets me go out for chores, at night. My brothers object, but my father says, “Let her go. I have complete trust in my daughter.” I take extreme care that my father’s trust is never betrayed (Samina, an unmarried woman 15 to 20 years old).

When asked if her brothers had to be as careful, Samina answered, “Girls carry the honor of the family. If they misbehave, the parents and all brothers and sisters get disgraced.”
Nida (the teacher) also had the same perception about family honor being invested in women, “It’s the girls who carry the honor of the family.”

The severity of corporate control, as was deduced from what the women told about their lives is dependent on the proximity or remoteness of the village to a big city.

Karima (a young mother, 20 to 25 years old) said:

Here, in this village, if the women are alone at home, it’s not a big deal. But back in my parents’ village (The parental village is located at a remote place.) if women are alone at home, the uncles and aunts start criticizing the family for leaving the women alone. Therefore, one of the brothers has to stay at home.

Nida (the teacher) related her own experience:

There is a big difference between these two villages. I’ll give you an example from my own experience. Last year a lady from that village visited my home. She came around 3 or 4 in the afternoon. I made tea for her. She looked around and said, “You are alone at home. Your mother leaves you home alone. It doesn’t make any sense.”

As for getting a job and supporting their families, Noreen said, “Girls can shoulder the responsibilities as well as boys, but our society won’t forgive them, if they leave home to work. They start saying ‘These people are making their daughters work; they are feeding off of their girls.’

Aamna (a grandmother, about 40 to 50 years old) expressed a belief somewhat similar to Noreen’s:
My sons say you can work inside your home, such as sewing or embroidery, but don’t leave home to work… Then people start saying they are making their mom work and letting her support them, instead of the other way around.

The women are considerate of their families and don’t want to do anything to upset them. Samina (an unmarried woman about 15 to 20 years old) said, “My brothers won’t allow me to get a job. They don’t think it’s appropriate for a woman to work. I don’t want to create problems at home.”

This is what Nasima (a young mother) said:

My family has already suffered enough, due to me. I don’t want to upset them anymore. Whenever my dad or brothers ask if my husband goes to work, I lie to them, and tell them he does. They ask why I don’t send my son to school. I make some excuses. I don’t want to tell them that he is out of school because he doesn’t have uniform or notebook or pencil.

When the husbands are unemployed, the women’s parents and siblings or the husbands’ families help out. The families’ help, though accepted, seemed to make the women uncomfortable. This is what Noreen (a mother of five, about 30 to 35 years old) said:

My brother has a vegetable stand. He gives me vegetables for free. I just don’t want to ask him for free stuff. My parents send me the left over vegetables, because they get a surplus (The entire time, when Noreen was telling me this, she kept her head down and did not look at me).

Nasima (a young mother of 18 to 22 years old) expressed similar sentiments:
I had never asked for money from anyone. I used to have money when I was not married, because I used to run the household; therefore, my brothers used to ask me for money. Now, when I have to ask someone for money, I feel miserable, as if I am begging on the streets. I have to gather up a lot of courage to ask someone for money.

“We didn’t have money, so we focused on our son” (Fazal Bibi, a grandmother, about 50 to 60 years old). Stromquist (1990) contends that as men have been assigned predominance in the public sphere and this sphere relies on educational credentials for many transactions, it is more important to ensure men’s education first. Moreover, it has been observed that parents assign girls more domestic responsibilities than they do to boys. In the case of poor households, girls represent important labor that the family cannot forego by allowing them to go to school.

Fazal Bibi (a grandmother, 50 to 60 years old) stated that as she and her husband had limited resources, they had concentrated their resources and their efforts on their only son. The young mothers and the unmarried women whose families didn’t have adequate funds, when they were growing up, also affirmed that their parents had chosen to send the brothers to school. However, they had stated it in quite a matter of fact manner, as if boy-preference was an accepted fact. “The family didn’t send me to school. There wasn’t enough money. They (the brothers) went to school but dropped out in 6th or 7th grade” (Jalila, an unmarried woman of about 15 to 20 years old). “She (Basheera) actually lives in a remote village and her family there has no desire to educate their children. They (the
family) give preference to sons rather than girls…” (Samina, an unmarried woman about 15 to 20 years old)

Conversely, the mothers that came to the literacy classes had intended to send both boys and girls to school, regardless of funds or distance from school. Fazal Bibi, the grandmother of a young boy and girl had very limited income, as the son was the only earning member of the family. She had to frequently borrow money from her brothers and sisters. When asked how she took care of the grandchildren’s expenses, she told that: “They (the children) go to school. Their fees have to be paid. All this will be taken care of the same way that food is.”

Fazal Bibi had no intention of discriminating between the girl and the boy, even if she had to borrow money for the expenses. Aamna’s (a grandmother, about 40 to 50 years old) three sons had to drop out of school to support the family but the girls continued in school:

She (the older daughter) passed 10th grade. The younger one is a junior in college. My sons dropped out of school before 10th grade. My family circumstances were such that I couldn’t afford to let them continue. They had to find jobs to support the family… I couldn’t complete my sons’ education, but I want my daughter to study as much as she can.

These brothers did not fall into the general patriarchal mold, as the fathers of these women did. This was neither a unique nor a common phenomenon. Hence without further research, the only possible explanation is that individual factors were at play.
As far as employment is concerned, most women confirmed the belief that women’s autonomy is very strongly dependent on kinship systems. Ross (1999) reports that educated and uneducated women in India and Pakistan, both report being intimidated by the responsibilities of autonomy and are constrained by structural powerlessness within the household and the community. “The parents are not going to make us get jobs and bring them money. But they want their girls to be able to take care of themselves when they are married and have to go through difficult times” (Nida, the teacher).

With the pressure of an increase in unemployment rates and consequently, an increase in poverty, the sanctions that ensure that males carry out the responsibility of supporting the women have weakened (Cain, Khanam & Nahar, 1979; Kandiyote, 1988; Wadud, 2006). Patriarchal social structures support extremely insular gender roles which dictate that the oldest male member of the family, the father or the oldest son carry the burden of supporting the family, while the women stay within the four walls of the household. Apparently, when these social structures coalesce with a recessive economy and increasing unemployment, they tend to generate a vicious cycle of poverty. Karima (a young mother, about 20 to 25 years old) told that, “My father-in-law died 10 years ago, since then my husband had been supporting the family.” Noreen (a mother of five, about 30 to 35 years old) said:

My husband is the oldest child, he had to feed and get all six of his younger brothers and sisters married. Now that his own children are growing, my husband is so drained that he doesn’t have the energy to work anymore.
Nida (the teacher) explained women’s partiality for sons as: “They want sons because they can take the burden of feeding the family, as the girls are not allowed to do any kind of job, which is available, while boys can get any job that is available and start sharing their parents’ burden.” Noreen (a mother of five, about 30 to 35 years old) said, “I gave birth to a son after three daughters. Then we wanted a companion for the son, so I had another child (a son).” Fazal Bibi’s (a grandmother, 50 to 60 years old) wish for her daughter-in-law was: “If Allah gives her (the daughter-in-law) one more son, then she’ll have a companion for her son.”

The women also gave following reasons for their desire for sons: “I have three older daughters, if they were boys they could have studied one or two more years and then found a job and shared their father’s burden” (Noreen, a mother of five, about 30 to 35 years old). “I just have one son. If we had two or three, one of them might have turned out to be a good son and our lives would have been different” (Fazal Bibi (a grandmother, about 50 to 60 years old). Nida, (the teacher) said, “Fazal Bibi married off her daughters early and concentrated on the boy… They have so many expectations from that one person that he cannot fulfill all the expectations, and then feels inadequate, while the parents feel let down.”

There is plenty of empirical evidence that in patriarchal societies, women’s lives, especially lower socio-economic status women’s lives, are extremely restricted and repressive. That said there is no ignoring the fact that men carry a huge burden of responsibility on their shoulders, as well.
Nonetheless, Noreen was expecting her sons to go through the same hard labor that their father had gone through. Although, it was apparently an unconscious conception on her part or what Afshar (1998) calls an internalized phenomenon of the patriarchal social system in which these men and women exist. Fazal Bibi’s son’s circumstances are not very different from Noreen’s husband’s. After his father’s retirement, as the only male child, Fazal Bibi’s son had the sole responsibility of supporting the parents, his own wife and three children, as well as a sister and her two children; who live in the same household.

With the economy in recession and unemployment on the rise, the male members of the household have a hard time trying to fulfill their responsibilities towards their kin. The men are stuck in this transitional stage where the economy has rendered them unable to carry on their role of the patriarch, but at the same time, the socio-cultural traditions that dictate that if they let their women go out and work they’ll be emasculated and dishonored are still strong. Seemingly, it must be hard for them to accept the actuality of their helpless state, and at the same time it must be unthinkable that the women leave home to work, since patriarchy has very inflexible demarcations for gender roles. N. Ahmed (2000) and Aksornkool (1997) contend that opening up opportunities for women also means increasing options for men. Once the rigid demarcation lines of tasks, roles, and functions are broken down, men would not be stigmatized if women can share the burden of supporting the family. This would decrease the pressure on men to make ends meet as breadwinners.
Achievement as an Objective State or Condition

This theme involves achieving something specific, such as vocational training or a job. Learning that leads towards a goal.

All the women expressed a desire to continue their education with Nida (the teacher) after the session ended and were willing to pay her tuition. Two of the women had intended to get a job. One of them wanted to get a job as an assistant for the women who came to the village to give polio drops to the children. However, the other woman said she was old and couldn’t figure out what kind of job an old woman like her could get. Nonetheless, she said, “I don’t want my family saying I have not done anything with my education.” The five unmarried women in the group were quite clear that education was essential for their well-being, but as for what they wanted to do with it; they had no definite plans. They had weighed their options against family pressures and had come to the conclusion that they did not want to create any unpleasantness within their families; therefore they had not conceived any ideas about getting a job. As far as their empowerment is concerned, keeping in mind that this was the only literacy project that the women had been involved with, it appears that coming to the literacy center had empowered them enough to negotiate on their behalf, such as leaving chores and coming to the center. Not the same can be said for their economic conditions. Although, they wanted to make things better, but so far they were just vague aspirations. They had not attempted to make any negotiations with their families about the issue of employment.

As far as marriage was concerned, the participants had definite opinions about the age at which the girls should get married - between 20 and 25, but again, family
dynamics are the benchmark against which they make or break their opinions. If the parents decide to get them married at a younger age, the parent’s decision would prevail. The married women, though, whose daughters were at the marriageable age, 15 to 20, were willing to delay the daughters’ marriages until the daughters were educated and had some kind of vocational training. The women had aspirations but as far as their empowerment was concerned it was quite precarious, in the sense that it was limited to their coming to the literacy center, in spite of objections from the families.

**Summary**

For the women, education was intimately connected with realization of a better life, in that it might not simply lead to a job, but to an enhancement of quality of life for the whole family and the next generation. The women could imagine a future for them, in which they would be counted among the educated and their daughters would have better lives than their mothers. Most women expected the men to carry the burden of supporting the family, but they also believed that the women should help out whenever there is a need. Although, the women didn’t like boy-preference, yet they had accepted it as inevitable and were trying to raise their own level of cognizance, by taking small steps, such as going to the literacy center, despite objections from family members. Education had empowered them enough to negotiate coming to the literacy center, although not yet to be able discuss employment with their families.

**Individual Stories**

I felt it was important to tell the participating women’s stories as individuals, as it is more meaningful, since our lives evolve as stories rather than analytical bits and pieces
put together in an analytical framework. Telling their stories as individuals makes it possible to feel their experiences even more intensely. The reader can form a holistic picture of their aspirations, determinations and agency as well as their painful experiences with gender discrimination, poverty, and boy-preference. Moreover, these three facets of life are so intermingled with each other that the analysis, by separating them, does not exhibit how these factors interact in the lives of these women. The stories can bring into focus the interdependence of the factors to portray the whole picture.

Basheera is a 14 or 15 year old unmarried woman. She has one older sister and four younger sisters and a brother who is the youngest. She is timid and quiet. She lived with her nani so that she could come to the center, as her parent’s village was in a remote area with no schools nearby. The nani’s sole support was her son who worked on low-skilled day-labor jobs, which were either seasonal or on contract basis. I got to meet the nani when she came to pick up Basheera from the center. The nani told me that she had educated Basheera’s older sister as well, and then sent her back to her mother. Then she (nani) brought Basheera to her home, so that she can get her educated. She planned to get all the girls educated, one by one.

What is so striking about nani is that she herself is not literate, but she is determined to get her granddaughters educated. Basheera is engaged to her khala’s son. The khala is not in favor of Basheera’s going to the center because apparently, housework would not be done. The nani told me, “I said I will do the work anyway I can, but Basheera will go to the center.” Yet she did not see a future for these girls in which they would be earning a living, as she said, during my informal discussion with her, “I
wish he (Basheera’s brother) were older, then he could have shared the parents’ burden.”

Under the patriarchal system it is the brother who is held responsible for supporting the family, if the father is unable to do so. Basheera’s brother was only three years old in 2011, when I conducted the study.

Noreen is a mother of five: three older girls and two younger boys. She is about 30 to 35 five years old. Her husband was unable to hold on to a regular job because he used to get sick. Her parents and brother were helping her with food and money. That was her only source of income, when her husband was unemployed. But she seemed to be very uncomfortable with this arrangement. She was coming to the literacy center to get basic literacy so that she could get a job as a helper for the women who came to give polio drops to the children.

Noreen told me her husband is the oldest brother; therefore, he had had to work hard to support his siblings. Under patriarchal social system, the oldest brother is expected to support the younger siblings, if the father cannot do it, until the siblings are independent. Noreen’s husband had worked as an agricultural laborer, all through his young life. According to Noreen, as a consequence of all that hard work that her husband did to support his siblings he was too exhausted; therefore got sick frequently and was unable to work regularly, to support his own wife and children. Yet what seems like a reproduction of the same patriarchal order; she wanted her sons to go through the same hard labor that her husband had gone through. She said, “I have three older daughters, if they were boys they could have studied one or two more years and then found a job and shared their father’s burden.” Nonetheless, she was determined not to get her daughters
married until they were educated and had some vocational training. She said, “I have been making cow dung patties all my life, but I don’t want that life for my daughters.”

Nasima is a young mother of two boys. Her older boy is from her first marriage, which lasted little more than a year. Her first husband was involved with another woman before his marriage to Nasima, but married Nasima under pressure from his parents. He didn’t have any job and didn’t want to take responsibility for his wife because he was forced into marrying her. Therefore, his parents decided that it would be better if they got divorced. Nasima came to live in her father’s home, along with her infant son, after her divorce. A year later she was married to her current husband. Her second husband was unemployed and couldn’t hold on to a regular job because he frequently got sick. She believed that it was apathy than anything else that kept her husband from holding on to a job. Her six year old son had to drop out of school because his parents couldn’t afford to buy him a uniform. Nasima’s father helped her with money and food, but she didn’t like to get help because to her it felt like she was begging on the streets. She was coming to the center so that she could get basic education and ultimately get a job. Nasima had tears in her eyes as she uttered these words:

At times I want to jump in the canal and drown myself. At other times, I want to poison my kids and myself too, so that I can free myself of this humiliating life. I feel as if I am going to have to endure this kind of life as long as I live. But then I look at my kids and I want to go on living for them. I want to die, and then I think to myself, “Who’s going to take care of my kids, when I die.” Then I feel I should do something for them.
Conclusion

The analytical framework developed by Seeberg functioned well to bring out and evaluate the voices of the women who were interviewed. We learned what the women valued in their world, in relation to education as well as what they wanted to do with education. This led to an understanding of the process of empowerment. Although, precarious, the women did achieve a degree of empowerment, by choosing to come to the literacy center, even though they had to leave their chores unfinished and face their families disapproval. Women were not only responsible for taking care of the children and the chores; they were also responsible for tending the elderly. Even so their work did not carry as much worth as that of the wage-earning male. Therefore, the process of learning itself was experienced by women as empowering, in the sense of having achieved something valuable, as compared to the work women did in their homes.

The functionings that are outlined in the theoretical framework as the crucial elements of well-being, agency freedom, and achievement of capabilities or aspirations emerged as themes in the interviews with the women.

The women expressed a sense of enjoyment and appreciation for education and gaining more confidence and cognitive control as they progressed through the literacy session. They aspired to continue building on their educational experiences, even after the literacy project ended, as well as to get the daughters educated, and even delaying marriage for them.

The participants did express agency in the decision they made to come to the center, despite disapproval from their families, as well as decision to stay in their
marriages, even though they had problems. Their close ties with their families would not allow, most women, to seek employment, or get involved in decisions about their prospective marriages. The women did not consider it proper to have an opinion in decisions about their marriages or getting a divorce, because the social norms did not deem that as appropriate conduct for the women; although Islam gives them those rights. I had considered asking the women about their status in Islam, but there were no substantive responses, other than some brief mention of ritualistic use of certain prayers from the Quran; so I did not include any findings about the role of religion in the women’s education and emancipation. None of the women and the male members of their families had literacy in Arabic and the women did not have literacy in Urdu either; therefore, they could not even read the Urdu translation of the Quran and Islamic principles.

The women who wanted to get a job had come to the literacy center hoping that education would be a ticket to employment. But the woman whose husband was employed and making good money did not express a desire to work. She was there, so that she could help her children with their homework.

The women believed that education would lead to the realization of a better life, not simply a higher standard of living but to an enhancement of quality of life for the whole family and the next generation. The women could envision a future, in which they would be counted among the educated, and their daughters would have better lives than their mothers. Most women expected the men to carry the burden of supporting the family, but they also believed that the women should have the capability of helping out
whenever there is a need. The women didn’t like boy-preference, yet they had accepted it as inevitable, and were trying to raise their own level of cognizance, by taking small steps, such as going to the literacy center, despite objections from family members.
CHAPTER V

WOMEN’S EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT

The analytical framework developed by Seeberg proved useful in bringing out and evaluating the voices of the women who were interviewed. We learned what the women valued in their world in relation to education, as well as what they wanted to do with education. This led to an understanding of the process of empowerment. The functionings that are outlined in the theoretical framework as the crucial elements of well-being, agency freedom, and achievement of capabilities emerged as themes in the interviews with the women.

The women, in coming to the literacy center, had developed a sense of confidence; enough to leave their chores unfinished and even face criticism from their families. They could imagine a possibility of change. The daughters of the women were continuing to go to school and even college, which showed that they could perceive a future for their daughters different from their own and a re-gendered identity for the daughters, if circumstances demanded. They even perceived delaying marriage for them until they could get them educated. Three of the women had even perceived employment, as their final goal. Nevertheless, all the women negotiated their re-gendered identities within the milieu in which they lived.

The small number of participants, in this study, does not allow generalizing in the same context. What is assessed cannot claim validity of concept or representativeness.
Rather, it makes it possible for the voices of the women, marginalized by their gender, social class, and rural habitation, to be heard. It also brings into sharp focus a hunger for education, their fortitude, aspirations, and agency, within an obdurate and unsympathetic environment. In so far as the answers to my research questions are concerned, the empowerment capabilities approach proved quite helpful in answering those questions.

The broad question that this study attempted to research is: What are the facilitating and obstructing factors for lower SES women in Pakistan to enroll and continue in NFE programs? My three sub-questions were:

1. Which are the factors which facilitate women’s education?
2. Which are the factors which obstruct women’s education?
3. What do women want from education?

We learned that as far as women’s initial enrollment was concerned, for most of the participating women, the facilitators were the mothers and/or grandmothers. Although, in one woman’s case, it was her husband who was himself educated. The teacher who was also recruited as a mobilizer, by the NGO, talked to the mothers who in turn talked to the male members of the family. Discourse with the women also divulged that they had always harbored the desire to get education, although, they had never thought of negotiating it with their families. As for their continuing to come to the classes, that seemed to rest on various dynamics - the women enjoyed the lessons as well as the socializing aspect, they had gained some confidence and curiosity about the larger world might have played some part as well.
The obstacles that these women were faced with were varied and multiple: poverty, household chores, boy-preference, family honor, early marriage, and seclusion are all included in the obstacles category. As for what they wanted to do with their education was determined by their family ties. They did not want to upset their family traditions; therefore they did not want to aspire to a job, except for those women who were in a dire need of employment. However, all the women expressed a strong proclivity to continue with their education, after the ongoing literacy session ended.

**Discussion of Findings: In Relation to Literature Review**

This section consists of the discussion of the answers to the research questions I had expected to find, in light of the literature review, in Chapter II, and the findings that were actually revealed during the analysis of the data, in Chapter IV.

**R.Q.1. Factors which Facilitate Women’s Education**

The factors which promoted women’s education include: a mobilizer person, a sense of well-being in an educational setting, flexibility in class timing, proximity to the literacy center, importance of helping children with school work, acquiring confidence, and socializing.

Unterhalter (2007) cites that depending on the context, successful initiatives to include girls and to support them to remain in school, and complete a basic education might include girls-only schools and female animators (mobilizers) working in the community. The mobilizers help to tackle some of these issues by working with parents: to change negative attitudes towards girls and schooling and to reinforce the right to an education. The mobilizers have helped fathers and mothers to understand the benefits of
schooling for their daughters. As relatively well-educated local women, in paid
employment, the mobilizers serve as positive examples for local girls. Nida (the teacher)
who was also the mobilizer for the NGO told that she convinced the mothers that
education was important for their daughters’ well-being. Most of the women expressed
sentiments that indicated that they had the awareness that education was important for
their well-being, although, they were not quite sure how. They wanted to be able to sound
educated when they talked to other people. Samina (an unmarried woman, about 15 to 18
years old) wanted to speak like educated women. Noreen (a mother of five, about 30 to
35 years old) had the same wish, “I want to be able to talk in Urdu like Nida (the teacher)
and Samina,” Because she considered Urdu - the national as well as official language -
not her native Punjabi, the language of the educated.

Most of the participating women, in this study, found class timings convenient.
They also liked the flexibility of bringing the children with them, if they did not have an
alternative arrangement, as well as the facility to arrive late and leave early, if they had
some family constraints. Unterhalter (2007) and Nussbaum (2000) emphasized the
importance of organizing around women’s domestic responsibilities for both the timing
of the school day and annual calendar.

For the women, in this study, proximity to the literacy center was one of the major
found that girls who live at some distance from school are particularly vulnerable; the
further they have to travel to school, the more remote the area, the greater the potential
risk.
The women in this study were reluctant, initially, to come to the classes. They were concerned about taking out time from their household chores, but gradually they had become enthusiastic and even urged other women to come. The mothers were eager to attend literacy classes themselves, and were also committed to sending their children (boys and girls) to school. They felt proud when they could read their children’s homework and school books. The women told that literacy classes had given them confidence and sense. Maddox (2008); Nussbaum (2006); Patel (2003) and Sen (2003) posit that in spite of all the barriers; women do value the opportunity to learn as adults. In fact, most women, according to the studies done in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan were committed to education (for themselves and their children), and struggled to be able to attend the literacy classes. Maddox (2008) further explains that women, in his study, in Bangladesh said that they enjoyed reading school books with their children, and they could also write accounts for their share-cropping. They were also clear about the value of becoming literate, saying that it had given them confidence and that they previously feared literacy, but now felt confident.

The women liked to go to the literacy classes because a literacy class gave them an opportunity to meet others and study collectively. Thus, literacy classes provided women learners with a social space, away from home, and offered them an opportunity to meet in a group, to share their common experiences about work, family, and illness. Nida, (the teacher) told that she gave the women ten minutes to talk amongst themselves because they were very stressed, due to family problems, when they came to the class. The participants also told that they enjoyed coming to the center, learning and socializing
with other women. Observation of the classes showed that the women frequently discussed their children’s and their own problems, and also offered advice on solving the problems. Patel (2003) posits that the way literacy classes were organized in Mahila Samakhya (a literacy project for women in India) provided an opportunity to a large number of women learners to meet, talk, share, and break their isolation, which is socially structured in their lives.

Women do not attend literacy classes, if they don’t anticipate any gains after completion of the literacy project, such as a job or vocational training (Ahmed, 2000; Kelly, 1999). Most of the participating women, in this study, did not expect any tangible benefits from the literacy project, but they still managed to make their way to the classes. Although, this could be due to the fact that they were not yet ready to negotiate with their families the ways of being and doing that these women valued. The issue of gains after basic education might seem to be more feasible as the answer to what women want from education, but it might serve as one of the facilitators, as well.

Most of the factors which promoted women’s education, such as a mobilizer person, a sense of well-being while in an educational setting, flexibility in class timing, proximity to the literacy center, importance of helping children with school work, acquiring confidence, and socializing were found to be related to the themes, such as enjoyment, confidence and cognizance that emerged within the dimension of well-being in the analytical framework.
R.Q.2. Factors which Obstruct Women’s Education

Factors which obstruct women’s education include: women’s traditional roles: as wives and mothers, son-preference, higher opportunity cost of girls’ education, women’s internalization of lesser status, segregation, purity before marriage and poverty. These are basically, the factors that hinder women’s capabilities to speak up on their own behalf and to make strategic life choices.

Most of the participating unmarried women told that their families complained about the participants’ education on the premise that the women were only going to take care of the households and the children; why would they need education for that. In countries with low levels of development, motherhood is construed as not even requiring literacy. Household tasks do require knowledge and organizational skills; they are not dumb tasks, yet they can be acquired through oral, informal methods. In countries that have almost exclusive motherhood roles for women, Pakistan being a case in point, the result is that there are extremely high rates of illiteracy among women and a high dropout rate after primary schooling (Stromquist, 1990).

Son-preference was a strong factor obstructing the participating women’s education. School participation and attainment by girls in developing countries shows that family decisions are powerful determinants of the probability that daughters will enroll, attend, and continue in school. Stromquist (1990) notes that since men have been assigned predominance in the public sphere and this sphere relies on educational credentials for many transactions, it is more important to ensure men’s education first. EFA (2000) reports that parents assign girls more domestic responsibilities than they give
to boys. In the case of poor households, girls represent important labor that the family cannot forego by allowing them to go to school. Fazal Bibi (a grandmother, 50 to 60 years old) stated that as she and her husband had limited resources, they had concentrated their resources and their efforts on their only son. The young mothers and the unmarried women whose families didn’t have adequate funds, when they were growing up, also affirmed that their parents had chosen to send the brothers to school. Moreover, family responsibilities were also a cause for their dropping out, while the brothers continued.

Thus, even if schools are available and girls enroll, patterns of girls’ poor attendance leading to dropping out tend to emerge. Norms about the appropriate roles of women (i.e. being married and having children) discourage parents from investing significantly in the education of their daughters.

Data suggest that the opportunity costs for schooling in Pakistan were higher for daughters than for sons. Young girls undertake more domestic chores, such as housework, care for younger siblings and collection of fodder than their brothers do (Mak, 1996; Qureshi & Rarieya, 2007).

It is interesting to note that attitudes may be changing. Although, most of the participating women, either did not go to school or had to drop out due to family constraints, they did not repeat the pattern with their own daughters, Noreen (a mother of five, about 30 to 35 years old) said that her daughters went to school and took care of all household chores, as well. Aamna (a grandmother, 40 to 50 years old) said that she did all the housework herself so that her daughters could study. She told that her older daughter had studied till 10th grade and the younger one was a junior in college. Her
husband had lost his job; and quite contrary to traditional patriarchal expectations, three sons had to drop out of school before 10th grade, so that they could find a job to support the family. She regretted the circumstance that forced her sons to drop out, but she categorically declared that her daughter would be able to study as much as she could, despite the higher opportunity cost of educating the girls. Without further research, the only possible explanation for this circumstance is that individual factors were at play.

This change in attitude might have proven to be a tremendous boost, as far as the next generation of women’s education was concerned. This new generation of women was not constrained – not as much as their mothers were – by poverty and socio-cultural traditions.

Women’s autonomy is predominantly dependent on kinship systems. Ross (1999) reports that educated and uneducated women in India and Pakistan, both report being intimidated by the responsibilities of autonomy and are constrained by structural powerlessness within the household and the community. Nida’s (the teacher) response to the criticism leveled against women who leave home for a job was that the parents are not getting the girls educated so that they can put them to work and make them support the family. They just want the girls to be able to take care of themselves, if circumstances demand. It appeared that the women had internalized the concept that autonomy was a trait that was not meant for women, therefore if they were to behave as educated individuals, they might be perceived as independent or rebellious, by the socio-cultural milieu. Therefore, educating towards employment was not seen as a feasible option. There was a general belief among men in the area of study, as Nida described it, that
education will make women independent, therefore they would not give their husbands the respect they deserve.

Distance from the center, among others, was one of the facilitating or obstructing dynamics that featured in the discourse with the women. Most participating women told that they were able to come to the center because it was close to their homes. One of the women (Aamna, a grandmother 40 to 50 years old) said that she is not even allowed to leave the street where she lives. Hence, remoteness of the literacy center from their neighborhoods would prove a deterrent in the provision of opportunity for a good education.

In culturally restrictive environments, adolescent girls may be viewed as morally suspect if they continue going to school. The importance of preserving a girl’s purity up to marriage leads to widespread withdrawal of girls from school at puberty (Mak, 1999; Qureshi & Rarieya 2007). The unmarried girls in this study had told of these problems as barriers to their enrollment in school. Some of the men in their families thought that they would somehow be corrupted by the influences outside of the home.

In some cases, there is resistance to outside interference on the part of the women themselves, who feel that their position might be threatened and family relations deteriorate if they insisted too strongly on their rights to be actively involved in intra-household decisions. The participating women expressed sentiments, such as, their brothers or husbands would not let them get a job and they did not want to create problems in the family by looking for a job outside the home. Owing to the delicacy of
the personal and family issues, Ahmad (1984) feels that it may be best to approach the problem in a somewhat indirect fashion, by arousing the women’s awareness.

The village of Naseerabad is located in Northern Punjab, where feudal influences are not a significant part of people’s lives. Women are even more underprivileged in areas with large landholdings and feudal and tribal influence. For example, the status of education measured in terms of enrollment and literacy rate shows that in northern Punjab districts, women have a higher educational status than districts in southern Punjab which has larger and agriculturally richer landholdings and consequently a much stronger feudal stronghold (Qureshi & Rarieya, 2007).

Poverty, which is cited as the major reason for female non-enrollment in most research studies for Pakistan is a significant part of the lives of the women, in the village. Given the existing gender hierarchies, women are the ones responsible for daily household management. As such they are the ones who must cope and devise survival strategies when household incomes fall (Heyzer & Sen, 1994). When asked how they coped with the decline in their household incomes, the women told that they fed the kids, they would ask the neighbors for food. They did not like this situation, which to them felt like begging on the streets.

According to Sen (1999) social and economic factors, such as basic education, elementary health care, and secure employment, can act as levers which could pull these women out of poverty and on their way to empowerment. These considerations, as Sen (1999) emphasizes require a knowledge of the ways of being and doing that the people value. In fact United Nations Development Program’s (UNDP) Asia-Pacific HDR (2010)
states in its explanation of gender equality: “No society can be fair and just—regardless of culture, history, ethnicity or religion—if freedoms and choice for all people are not a reality” (p. 23). Moreover, HDR (2011) defines human development as: “Human development is the expansion of people’s freedoms and capabilities to lead lives that they value and have reason to value” (p.1). Asia-Pacific HDR (2010) cites that even when women have capabilities, they face shortages in opportunities, such as barriers to paid work (Asia-Pacific HDR (2010)).

The five unmarried women in the group had weighed their options against family pressures and had come to the conclusion that they did not want to create any unpleasantness within their families; therefore they had not conceived any ideas about getting a job.

The married women, whose husbands were unemployed, were the ones who wanted to get a job. The one whose husband was earning good money did not express a wish to work outside of the home. (The concept of good money, in this context can be understood in terms of being able to pay all the bills and having three meals a day). She was coming to the literacy center to be able to help her children with their homework. Feldman (2001) contends that there are fewer propensities to work, among lower SES women, if the husband is earning good money. For women not to work signifies that the family can take care of the women. It could also mean that the women are trying to make the men feel their responsibility, to take care of their family.
R.Q. 3. What do Women Want from Education

The third dimension of the analytical framework that of achievement of capabilities involves themes which are: participation in the distribution of resources in the family and community, the ability to imagine social change for self and others, taking on a re-gendered role, objecting to male dominance/preference and doing something specific with education, such as getting a job. However, while the women can imagine a future when they and their daughters would be counted as educated and even be able to get a job, at this fragile stage of their empowerment, taking on a regendered role or objecting to male-preference are things that they could not even envision. They can only reach this final stage of empowerment, after they have gone through the second dimension, i.e. agency freedom.

Ross (1996, 1999) stresses two questions – what will education do for women? And what will women do with education? - are crucial when designing programs for women’s education. Kelly (1999) contends that women’s education is greatly affected by the opportunities for women to obtain gainful employment. With the exception of two or three women, the other participants did not see a future for them in which they would be earning a living, yet they came to the classes regularly and were even willing to continue after the ongoing literacy session ended. Yet they still expected the male members of the family to carry the burden of supporting the family.

For some of the women, in the literacy program, such as Noreen and Nasima, a job was of the utmost urgency, as they and their families had no steady source of income. But the unfortunate reality is that there were hardly any jobs available which these
women could do without leaving their homes, which they did not wish to do. Moreover, jobs in the formal sector require education and training, neither of which, at the time that the study ended, was in the plans of the government or the NGO.

Sen (1999) posits that working outside the home and earning an independent income tend to have a clear impact on the social standing of a woman in the household and the society. Her contribution to the family prosperity is then more visible and hence, the woman has more voice in the household. Mak (1996); Qureshi and Rarieya (2007) point out that education is essential before women can find any job in the formal sector.

Sen (2008) further argues that there are fundamental inequalities in gender relations within the family or the household in South Asian countries. Family arrangements can be quite unequal in terms of sharing the burden of housework and childcare. It is an established tradition in a patriarchal system that men will naturally work outside the home; therefore they would not be sharing any household chores or childcare. This tradition prevails even under those circumstances where the men are unemployed and unable to support the family. Two women in the literacy center were gossiping with each other that their husbands expected to be served food where they were sitting and do not bother to get it themselves.

**Poverty, Gender and Education, Equality and Patriarchy**

As this research indicates, no single measure itself is sufficient to take on entrenched and persistent gender inequalities. Policies to stimulate growth must be accompanied by measures to change norms that block women’s progress (Asia-Pacific Human Development Report, 2010) A remedy for this predicament might lie in women’s
empowerment and agency through such means as women’s education and gainful employment (Sen, 2008).

Ahmed (2000) and Aksornkool (1997) contend that promoting gender equality not just means opening up opportunities for women, but it also endorses increasing options for men. Once the rigid demarcation lines of tasks, roles and functions are broken down, men would not be stigmatized if women can share the burden of supporting the family. This would decrease the pressure on men to make ends meet as breadwinners.

As far as the involvement of men, in the women’s education was concerned, most of the participating women told that their fathers, husbands or brothers were indifferent to the women’s participation in the literacy project. While the men didn’t stop them from going, they didn’t want to know anything about their homework or what they had learned. Nasima (a young mother) was the only one who said that her husband was educated and wanted her to get as much education as she wanted. All of the other women said that their fathers, husbands or brothers had either dropped out of school or did not go at all. Farhan (a young man, about 20 to 25 years old) said that when educated women brag about their learning in front of the husbands who are completely illiterate, the husbands normally react by hitting the women. Perhaps men’s literacy could be one of the facilitating dynamics in the issue of women’s literacy. Conklin (1976) posits that in households where both husband and wife are educated, the wife’s opinions and decisions are more valued.

Kabeer (2000) contends that when women have internalized their social status as persons of lesser value, accepted their secondary claims on household resources,
acquiesced to violence at the hands of their husbands, were willing to bear children at the
detriment of their own health to satisfy their own or their husbands’ preference for sons,
all these behaviors undermine their own well-being.

Almost all the women, in this study, had declared that marriageable age for girls
should be above 20 years. However, when it came to a decision about their marriages all
the women indicated that they would choose to leave it to their parents. The parents
would have no other option, but to get them married if they got a good marriage proposal,
even if it was at the cost of getting the daughters married at a young age. The women in
difficult marriages had chosen to stay, in their marriages for the sake of their children.
The women justified violence on the premise that the men were stressed due to
unemployment, therefore they react with violence to any misbehavior on the women’s
part. In other words, the women blamed themselves for getting beaten by their husbands.
As for having large families, they told that they (both husband and wife) had wanted
more than one son, in case one of the sons didn’t turn out to be good, the other sons could
take care of the parents. The women in this research had perceived having sons as what

Kabeer’s (2000) argument is that while these forms of behavior could reflect
choice, they are also choices which stem from, and serve to reinforce women’s
subordinate status. They remind us that power relations are expressed not only through
the exercise of agency and choice, but also through the kinds of choices people make. She
goes on to explain that any intervention aimed at transforming women’s lives, without
some knowledge of ways of being and doing which are realizable and valued by women
in that setting, runs into the danger of proposing a process of empowerment, and hence violating the essence of the process; which is to enhance women’s capacity for self-determination.

As far as fertility is concerned, evidence has shown that while schooling brings issues of family size into the domain of women, the principal linkage of female schooling to the decline in fertility is part of a much wider change in the position of the individual within the family and that of the and family within the society (D. Kandiyoti & A. Kandiyoti, 1987).

By stressing a conjugally oriented family with relative equality between the sexes, in which children become the object of parental investment rather than a source of parental income, and by inculcating a non-fatalistic, innovation-adoptive world view, schooling increases the perceived costs of children and also the perceived feasibility of limiting their numbers.

Insofar as women in highly patriarchal settings receive less schooling and are isolated from modernizing influences, their orientation toward fertility is likely to remain more traditional (Mason & Taj, 1987).

An issue that arose unexpectedly in the analysis was the effects of men’s literacy on the literacy of women. This study included only one case where the husband was educated and encouraged his wife in her education. The rest of the men in the participants’ families were not educated, and most of the other men were indifferent and those that were unhappy did not impede. None of the women told that the men in their families were violently against the women going to the literacy center. It is hard to say
from this one case what impact could men’s literacy have had on women’s educational experiences. Further research is needed about this issue.

Kabeer’s (2000) argument about the kinds of choices people also raises the question of sustainability. The women could encounter obstacles in their struggle to sustain a sense of empowerment in the face of an inauspicious socio-cultural environment (Monkman, 1998; Nussbaum, 2004; Seeberg, 2011). Sen (1999) contends that:

The deprived people tend to come to terms with their deprivations because of the sheer necessity of survival, and they may, as a result, lack the courage to demand any radical change, and may even adjust their desires and expectations to what they unambitiously see as feasible. (p. 63)

This literacy session, ongoing during the research was supposed to end in February 2011 and there were no plans to extend it further or take it to the next step - to begin a vocational training program. The newly literate participants would reenter their lives in the home under very similar conditions as before the program. Under these circumstances, it might be difficult for the women to nurture their sense of empowerment.

Mak (1996); Qureshi and Rarieya (2007) cite that poverty is one of the major reasons for female non-enrollment in most research studies in Pakistan. Related is the demand for child labor. Data suggest that the opportunity costs for schooling in Pakistan were higher for daughters than for sons. Young girls undertake more domestic chores; such as housework, care for younger siblings, and collection of fodder than their brothers do. Moreover, economic returns are not associated with girls’ education as much as with
boys. While boys are expected to contribute to the family income and status, any returns to investment in girls’ education are seen to accrue not to the parents but to the family to which she is married.

The women, in this study, told that they fed the kids when there wasn’t enough food, and stayed hungry themselves. They were under a lot of stress from lack of funds and having to ask for help from family and neighbors. Most women had to drop out of school because of family responsibilities, as well as economic constraints. When the families did not have enough funds, it was the women who dropped out of school, while the brothers stayed. Most of the women didn’t anticipate that their families would let them work.

Given the existing gender hierarchies, women are the ones responsible for daily household management. As such they are the ones who must cope and devise survival strategies when household incomes fall. When households have to reduce food consumption, areas with rigid gender hierarchies, such as South Asia have witnessed women and girls consuming less food than men and boys. Similarly, when user charges are introduced or increased for education and healthcare, the access of women and the girl child to these services is affected, especially in a situation of poverty (Heyzer & Sen, 1994).

A long tradition of patriarchal social structures has fashioned a sense of social norms about gender roles which is so strongly embedded in the minds of the women that they believe that autonomy is somehow not an appropriate trait for women. Mak (1996);
Qureshi and Rarieya (2007) contend that traditional taboos on women’s employment, poor employment opportunities in general and for women in particular; can prove to be deterrents, in women’s education. The subordination of women to male members of the family, and women’s unequal status in society, in general, are constraints on female emancipation and education.

**Conclusion**

The study was helpful in discovering some of the factors that can support women to complete their basic education. However, little evidence was found that showed that some of the socio-cultural obstructions to women’s enrollment were affected or ameliorated. The real dilemma for these women is that even if there were education or training available, they would first have to surpass the socio-cultural constraints - their seclusion, restraints on their movements, family honor and social standing - confining them to the four walls of the household. Breaking free of these patriarchal norms, in itself is not a small task of empowerment. In other words, the second dimension – agency freedom - in the empowerment capabilities approach is what the women need most emphasis on, if and when a project is defined for these women’s empowerment. The women need help in speaking up for themselves and making strategic life choices. Only after achieving this level can they move on to an achievement of capabilities.

Seeberg and Ross (2007) postulate that human development is not complete without improving women’s status, especially their educational status. There is compelling evidence that the social and economic rates of return from schooling are on
the whole higher for women than for men. It is argued that female education increases women’s productivity and contributes to higher economic returns.

Subsequently, perhaps for the women in this study, a continuation of the process of education along with social action is the best course of action for sustaining the precarious state of empowerment that they had achieved through the literacy program.

And perhaps, there would come a time when they would be empowered enough to be able to negotiate with their families for the ways of being and doing which are realizable and valued by the women, and hence would develop a true capacity for self-determination. Four months of literacy classes had given the women enough confidence to leave their chores unfinished, face criticism from their families and community to come to the literacy center. From this we can deduce that continuation of education in collusion with social action with a focus on the capabilities of the women to speak on their own behalf and make decisions about their own lives can make an impact as far as their empowerment is concerned.

Implications of Research for Public Policy

This research study was instrumental in divulging the facilitating and obstrusive factors in women’s enrollment and continuation in literacy classes. My expectation is that this research study would be a source of realization for the developers of public policy, as well as the NGOs that design literacy projects that a project needs to take into consideration the facilitating factors, so that the women are encouraged to enroll and continue in literacy projects. It should also incorporate an awareness of the sociocultural factors that hinder women’s education and help them deal with those obstacles. Along
with the facilitating and obstructive factors, vocational training should also be an essential design consideration. Furthermore, it is my hope that Pakistani government and the religious authorities would work towards enhanced provision of literacy training for adults and that gender issues would be addressed for both women and men.

A project design needs to be contextual to the ways of being and doing which are cherished by the women and men; and for that to be possible, it is vital that the project design be dialogic.

**Implications for Future Research**

This study had some limitations which could be avoided in future research to add to the knowledge base. The number of participants was too small to generalize the findings, in the sense that the findings cannot be said to be applicable to rural women at large. There were some time constraints, as well. I had to cut short the interview time to half because of some constrictions of time, on the part of the NGO. It would have been helpful if the time-constraints were settled before the study began. A study of the sustainability of the women’s sense of empowerment, after the ongoing literacy session had ended, as well as the role religion can play in the women’s empowerment would be feasible areas for future research. An effect of men’s education on women’s education and empowerment is another perspective to take into consideration for a research study.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

LETTER OF CONSENT
Appendix A

Letter of Consent

From: Washko, Paulette
Sent: Wednesday, December 22, 2010 1:43 PM
To: 'akhan@kent.edu'
Cc: SEEBERG, VILMA

Subject: IRB approval for protocol #10-374 - retain this email for your records
Attachments: 10-374 revised consent sub 22 Dec 2010 irb stamped.pdf
Importance: High

RE: IRB # 10-374 entitled “Education and Women: A Research Study Investigating the Expressed Ideas regarding Nonformal Education among Lower Socioeconomic Status Women in Pakistan”

Hello,
The contingencies requested by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board at the December 15, 2010 convened meeting have been met. I am pleased to inform you that the IRB fully approved your Application for Approval to Use Human Research Participants.

Approval is effective for a twelve-month period: December 15, 2010 through December 14, 2011

*A copy of the IRB approved consent form is attached to this email. This “stamped” copy is the consent form that you must use for your research participants. It is important for you to also keep an unstamped text copy (i.e., Microsoft Word version) of your consent form for subsequent submissions.

Federal regulations and Kent State University IRB policy require that research be reviewed at intervals appropriate to the degree of risk, but not less than once per year.
The IRB has determined that this protocol requires an annual review and progress report. The IRB tries to send you annual review reminder notice to by email as a courtesy. However, please note that it is the responsibility of the principal investigator to be aware of the study expiration date and submit the required materials. Please submit review materials (annual review form and copy of current consent form) one month prior to the expiration date.

HHS regulations and Kent State University Institutional Review Board guidelines require that any changes in research methodology, protocol design, or principal investigator have the prior approval of the IRB before implementation and continuation of the protocol. The IRB must also be informed of any adverse events associated with the study. The IRB further requests a final report at the conclusion of the study.

Kent State University has a Federal Wide Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP); FWA Number 00001853. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at 330-672-2704 or pwashko@kent.edu.

Respectfully,
Paulette Washko | 330.672.2704 | Pwashko@kent.edu | 137 Cartwright Hall
Manager, Research Compliance, Communications and Initiatives
"Before you speak, ask yourself, is it kind, is it necessary, is it true, does it improve on the silence?"

Sai Baba
APPENDIX B

SAMPLE OF AN INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANTS
Appendix B

Sample of an Interview with Participants

1/18/2011

Interview with Fazal Bibi and Noreen

Researcher: Why did you decide to come to the center?

Fazal Bibi: I have always had a great desire for education. I couldn’t go to school, when I was of age. I already knew how to write my name but I wanted to learn some math. I also had a great wish to learn Quran. When my son was in my lap I started learning to read Quran. I finished reading it within 2 or 3 months, I studied day and night. I love to get education but my mind starts to wander; I have so many problems at home. There was another lady here from some other NGO, but we didn’t learn anything from her. Now I have learned so much and I’ll keep working on it. I wanted to come and I said my daughter-in-law would come too. We both come. R: Did you get any criticism from your family for coming to the center?

Fazal Bibi: Yes, they would laugh and say that you are going to study at this age. I told them I am going to do my best; the rest is in Allah’s hands. It’s said education should continue till you are dead.

Noreen: My husband didn’t object but my devars [husband’s brothers] would laugh at me for studying at my age. “She should be embarrassed”, they say, “going out wearing joggers.” My devranis [husband’s brothers’ wives] said the same things. I told them that
they should come with me, so they can learn something as well. The devranis have not
even read Quran. I have read all of Quran. My kids all go to school.

Nida: Their basic problem is that their husbands are unemployed; therefore the women
want to be able to get education in order to earn some money. Noreen has 3 daughters
and 2 boys to raise; therefore she wants to find a job as a helper for women who
administer polio drops. “Basically” she wants to support her family.

Noreen: There’s not enough to feed the kids. How can I think about getting my girls
married? Women tell me you should get them married off, they are all grown, but I don’t
want to, yet. I want them to get educated and get a job, before I marry them off.

R: How do you manage when your husband is unemployed?

Noreen: I tell him, “I will cook whatever you bring, or I won’t cook at all.” He sometimes
borrows money.

R: How do you repay the loan?

Noreen: People grumble about it. He returns the money when he finds a job. My brother
has a vegetable stand; he gives me vegetables for free. I just don’t want to ask him for
free stuff. My parents send me the left over vegetables because they get a surplus.

(Noreen wouldn’t look at me)

R: Fazal Bibi is your son employed?

Fazal Bibi: Yes, he has set up sewing machines but the money coming in is not enough.

R: How do you manage then?

Fazal Bibi: I borrow from my brothers or sisters. When we have any money we return the
loans.
R: How do you meet the kids’ needs?
Fazal Bibi: They go to school. Their fees have to be paid. All this will be taken care of the same way that food is.
Nida: Her husband used to work but now he’s retired. If the men are unemployed they can get loans from their families. When they have no other option they say that time is going to pass anyway, we just have to manage, somehow. If the bad times are here we have to endure them, somehow.
R: How is your relationship with your husband when there are all these stresses at home?
Noreen: Daggers fly. (The women laugh) The husbands and wives have very fierce fights.
Fazal Bibi: My son is very volatile; he doesn’t listen to anyone. He doesn’t respect his parents or his wife. We all just hunker down quietly in a corner, when he starts to yell and scream.
Nida: When the men are jobless, they are extremely stressed. They cannot obviously hit the parents but they don’t hesitate to hit the wife.
Fazal Bibi: Sometimes words hurt as much as being hit. (Her pain was written on her face)
Nida: It’s the wife who has to bear the brunt of the husband being unemployed. When there is stress the husband takes it out on the wife. This is very common among the inhabitants of this village.
Fazal Bibi: My husband is not well. He’s had two vertebrae replaced. He cannot work. He’s had surgery on his stomach too. I just have one son. If we had two or three, one of
them might have turned out to be a good son and our lives would have been different. I have no hope of ever having a stress-free life.

R: How important do you feel is marriage in a woman’s life?

Fazal Bibi and Noreen: That is the only important thing among our people.

Noreen: People in the village want to get their girls married off early.

Fazal Bibi: Girls should have education and some kind of job-training, before they get married, because one has to face both good and bad times. They should be able to help out their families during difficult times. I am illiterate; therefore I have had to do any job that I could get. I have knotted yarn for yarn beds, knitted Naalas [strings for salwars (pants)] and parandas [string for braiding hair]. I worked very hard to feed my family; knitted sweaters and sewed comforters; still the last few years of my life are even harder and more stressful.

Nida: Actually in our villages the families just marry the girls off and focus all their attention on the boys. Then if the boys turn out to be good for nothing, it is much harder on the parents. They get the feeling that they paid so much attention to the son and he in turn treated them as dirt, they (parents) feel that they are worthless.

Fazal Bibi: Now, I say it myself. “I have three daughters; if the fourth one had been a girl too I wouldn’t have been worse off.

R: If a woman doesn’t get married what is her life like?

Fazal Bibi: Then everybody says “why is that girl not married there must be something wrong with her.” Nobody asked for her. There was no proposal for her.
Nida: Two of my father’s sisters were unmarried. When it was time to divide the parents’ property, my older phupi [paternal aunt] plucked up enough confidence to ask for her share in the property. The sisters used to live with us. Now they have moved to my uncle’s. Unmarried women rely on their share of property or are dependent on their brothers for managing the property and then giving the sisters their share from it. They might even get a water buffalo and sell the milk. But their life is not worth much. They just plow through life, without any purpose.

Fazal Bibi: The girls should be able to take responsibility for their own selves and their children.

R: Fazal Bibi did your daughters go to school?

Fazal Bibi: No.

R: Why not?

Fazal Bibi: We didn’t have money, so we focused on our son.

R: How about your son?

Fazal Bibi: He left school in 7th or 8th grade. He didn’t want to study. We tried very hard but he just wouldn’t study

Nida: Fazal Bibi married off her daughters early and concentrated on the boy, but he was so spoiled by all the attention lavished upon him that he did not want to work hard on his studies. They have so many expectations from that one person that he cannot fulfill all the expectations and then feels inadequate, while the parents feel let down. That is why the parents need to have a relatively balanced attitude towards both boys and girls. Fazal Bibi’s problem is the thwarted expectations attached to the son.
Fazal Bibi: I can’t sleep at night thinking about all the problems that we are faced with. Reality turned out to be very different from what I had expected.

Noreen: May Allah forgive all our mistakes. Poor people get stressed out from all their problems and then they get affected with all kinds of diseases. Then we don’t have any money to get treatment. We cannot even get a test done. How can we pay for the whole treatment? Then we look for a hospital that would give free treatment.

R: When you study here and then go home do you feel any difference within yourself?

Noreen: I feel I have learned a lot. I want to be able to read fluently and be able to write my name, so that I can have a job helping the health workers give polio drops to the kids.

Fazal Bibi: I want to be able to read the boards displaying advertisements.

Nida: Not all families give permission to the women to work in schools or colleges because they have to work alongside men or face the men in one way or another. Even if the husband lets the wife work there, the husband’s family wouldn’t allow it. The boys get permission to study in schools and colleges but the girls are not allowed to travel too far from home to study. Therefore, they have relatively limited opportunities than boys.

R: Do you ever ask your husband to listen to you while you are studying at home?

Noreen: No he’s illiterate. If I try to study in front of him, he says, “It seems like there is a demon in this woman.” My husband doesn’t mind my studying. When my daughters do their h.w. I ask them to give me something to read. At that time my devars and devranis [husband’s brothers’ wives] would say, “Look at her, she’s started to study too. Everybody in my in-laws’ home is illiterate. They have not even read Quran. My
mother-in-law wanted to read Quran. I had helped her read till the 7th sipara [chapter in Quran] but then she got sick and can’t study anymore. She is incontinent.
R: Do you remember when you were growing up how your parents treated boys and girls?
Fazal Bibi: My mother treated both boys and girls almost equally. One of my brothers is educated, the other two are illiterate. I didn’t go to school either. My mother made parathas for boys as well as girls. But when I got married, my mother-in-law would say fry the chapattis for the men, you women don’t need to do that. I had a hard time getting used to eating dry chapatti with tea. The same then continued with grandchildren.
Noreen: We are three sisters and 6 brothers. My father earned good money. My parents didn’t discriminate when it came to feeding the kids. Ever since I got married I have been surrounded with problems. First I lived with my mother-in-law. She was harsh with me. My husband is the oldest child, he had to feed and get all 6 of his younger brothers and sisters married. Now that I have started living independently, my husband is so drained, that he doesn’t have the energy to work anymore.
Nida: Now that he’s taken care of those responsibilities, his own daughters are grown and he has to take care of their responsibilities but he just doesn’t have the strength left to work hard anymore.
Noreen: I tell my husband that you used to be strong like an ox, you could load the trolleys (during the harvest) without any difficulty, but now that it’s our turn, you have nothing left in you. (The women laugh and sigh simultaneously).
R: Did you ever think of planning your family; to restrict childbirth to two or three kids?
Noreen: I did but Allah kept giving me daughters one after the other. I gave birth to a son after three daughters. Then we wanted a companion for the son, so I had another child (a son). Now I pray to Allah, that please, I don’t want any more children.

R: Do any health workers come to your village to tell you about contraceptives?

Noreen: They come and tell us.

Nida: Actually in rural neighborhoods nothing can happen without the mother-in-laws’ permission. In families where mother-in-laws are domineering, everything must happen with their permission. The women who live independent, which are not many, do think of having fewer children. They want sons because they can take the burden of feeding the family while the girls are not allowed to do any kind of job, which is available, while boys can get any job that is available, and start sharing their parents’ burden.

Noreen: I have 3 older daughters; if they were boys they could have studied one or two more years and then found a job and shared their father’s burden. Girls can shoulder the responsibilities as well as boys but our society won’t forgive them if they leave home to work. They start saying “these people are making their daughters work; they are feeding off of their girls.”

Nida’s mom: You can let the boys stay out late for their studies. But parents start worrying if the girl is not back before sunset.

Nida: Women come and tell my mother “why do you send them to college. Think about finding them a husband instead.” The parents are not going to make us get jobs and bring them money. But they want their girls to be able to take care of themselves when they are
married and have to go through difficult times. Boys should not be pampered. They need to be disciplined too, not just the girls.

R: Fazal Bibi is your daughter-in-law planning to have more kids?

Fazal Bibi: If Allah gives her one more son, then she’ll have a companion for her son. That would be enough I think. It’s up to her. My daughter-in-law is a very nice girl.

R: Will her husband be willing to limit the number of kids?

Fazal Bibi: I don’t think he will object.

Noreen: My husband is willing to stop as well.

Fazal Bibi: I never complained when I had girls. I always thanked Allah. My daughter-in-law was upset about giving birth to a daughter. I told her you have a beautiful daughter and a son. Allah will give you another son too. You don’t need to cry. If the boy is kind, one is enough and if he turns out to be wicked then even three are not enough.

Noreen: A family in our neighborhood has a very gentle and polite son. He is the oldest. To have another son, the mother gave birth to 8 daughters.

Nida’s mom: The mother had her tubes tied after the birth of the 8th daughter. I had a son after 3 daughters. Then I had one more.

Nida: I think Allah should give only sons, to poor parents.

Fazal Bibi: No. There should be girls as well.

Aamna: Girls are more considerate for their parents.

Nida: When in-laws make demands from the daughter-in-laws, the parents have to meet the demands, or the in-laws will send her back home. The girls have to face the demands
of their in-laws and at the same time they don’t want to make their parents upset by telling them. Therefore, they are pulled in both directions and get extremely stressed.

Nida’s mom: We don’t follow the teachings of Allah and his Rasul (P.B.U.H.) [Prophet Muhammad] that is why we are faced with these problems of dowry.

Noreen: The govt. should do something about this dowry problem.

R: How do you want to continue your reading and writing practice, once your classes at the center are done?

Noreen: We are just going to stick to Nida

Fazal Bibi: We are just going to ask her (Nida) to keep giving us lessons.

Nida: I would like to request Saima (the literacy coordinator) to create some job opportunities for the women who are interested in a job. I don’t want them to feel that they have just wasted 6 months here at the center.

Fazal Bibi: I don’t want my family saying I have not done anything with my education.

Nida: The ladies tell me they want to be able to get a job because they want to help out their families. These women will have to face all kinds of negative criticism from the men and women in their families, if they are not able to utilize their education in doing some work.

Fazal Bibi: I am too old, what kind of job can I do? I can read numbers. May be I can direct women in a hospital who can’t read. I can read and write numbers up to 100.

Nida: Next step should be some kind of vocational training. This is what these women demand. They have kids and their husbands are unemployed. Naturally, they want to make use of their education to support their families. I have a learner Shabana, whose
husband was an addict, and then he left home and disappeared. She has 4 small kids and is dependent on her mother for all their needs. They can be helpers in giving polio drops or helpers in hospitals.
APPENDIX C

SAMPLE OF MEMO
Appendix C

Sample of Memo

1/10/2011

While Farhan was walking me to the center from the parking lot I asked him where the men worked from the village. He told me that most of them worked at the Bata factory across the highway, some were in the police force and some worked in the city of Lahore.

When I arrived a few women were already there working on their lessons. The kids were lurking around quietly eating potato chips. Fazal Bibi said her daughter-in-law wasn’t there because she was making her husband breakfast. There was a new girl Basheera there. The teacher told me she had taken a week off to go visit her parents in another village. She lived with her maternal grandmother to come to the center, as there was no center in her parent’s village.

Fazal Bibi sent one of the younger women to go get her books from her home.

The women were working on their writing and Fazal Bibi was asking for help from another woman, with reading.

The woman with the husband problem (Nasima) arrived with the younger child.

The women correct each other’s pronunciation and nobody takes umbrage at that.

The teacher asked a woman why her notebook was messed up. The woman replied sometimes the kids get hold of the notebook and mess it up.
One woman wanted to know why Farzana, Fazal Bibi’s daughter-in-law, hadn’t turned up yet. The teacher replied she was bogged down with breakfast for her husband and father-in-law.

The teacher (Nida) told me a teacher from another center had told her to make the learners follow the dots for words, but the teacher said that that way she had to do a lot of work and the learners tended to depend on that instead of making their own effort. She had quite a bit of difficulty in the beginning but now they are doing well.

The teacher told me that when she tested them, the ones who didn’t do well and didn’t get a star, said their kids say “other moms get stars, why don’t you?” Therefore, they wanted to do better next time.

The woman (with difficult husband) (Nasima) got a phone call and at the same time the son came around to say that the father wanted to ask the mother something.

The kids were playing around. The women were busy working on the lessons and tending to the kids as well. Sometimes the teacher admonished the kids a little to sit quietly.

They also had a pop quiz; to write numbers from 1 to 35. The teacher reminded them not to cheat.

They were fine with borrowing pencils and erasers. One child was cranky today (Noreen’s boy). Farzana came late and said her daughter wasn’t feeling well, that’s why she was late. The daughter was with her.

The teacher told me she has to coax and cajole the women to come to the center. If you insist too much they say, “keep your books and stuff, we are not going to come.”
When the teacher was giving them grades in math quiz, Farzana said, “my daughter says, why don’t you get a star mom, like other moms.”

Fazal Bibi wanted to know which grade she got.

The teacher individually helps the learners who had difficulty solving math problems.

The cranky child was quiet for a while, and then started again. The women are not perturbed that the child is disrupting their work, rather they offer advice to the mother, how to deal with him. It seemed as if they were reconciled to the fact that those were the constraints they were faced with and they would deal with them the best way they can.

The teacher was discussing political and social issues such as terrorism, related to the lesson. Fazal Bibi said they burn their own country’s buses and buildings and then the whole nation suffers. The teacher explains how Islam says to take care of your family responsibilities first before you do anything else.

The teacher told me that sometimes the women come during the evening to ask for help with something and she encourages them.

The women studied in the verandah sitting on a thin carpet. The house is brick with running water. There seem to be three or four rooms. The kitchen is detached from the house.

The other grandmother left when somebody yelled from outside that somebody wanted her.

The teacher discussed the issue of girls as the unwanted sex. Fazal Bibi says; “Girls are a blessing from Allah. There are people who long for a girl.” Related to the
issue, the women talk about how mother-in-laws can make life hell for daughters-in-law. Then they talk about another village where mother-in-laws are very controlling, and laugh, still laughing, they point towards the woman (with difficult husband) (Nasima)’s mother-in-law as an example.

The teacher also discussed political issues, such as burning buses in protest for shortages of natural gas and electricity. Burning the buses reduces the number of buses on the streets creating problems for girls who travel in buses for schools and colleges.

After the lesson the woman (with difficult husband) (Nasima) the woman with the hat and the cranky child (Noreen) and Saadia (with difficult brothers) and I had an informal discussion sitting on the carpet. The hat woman’s husband and the one with difficult husband; both their husbands were out of work. Hat woman said she had 5 daughters and 2 sons. She was holding the youngest son who was 2 years old. She told me the child was cranky because there was no gas and she couldn’t boil the milk to pasteurize it, therefore couldn’t feed the child. She had just bought her some snack from a street vendor. The woman with difficult husband said she was married young although she hadn’t wanted to get married but her mother had died and her father didn’t want to take her responsibility, therefore had married her off without much attention to the man’s job and personality and what kind of family and home he had.

Meanwhile, the teacher brought a school uniform for the woman with the difficult (Nasima) husband for her older son who is 6 and had been kicked out of the public school because he didn’t have a uniform. The teacher apologized profusely to the mother but said she couldn’t let a child stay out of school because his parents couldn’t afford to buy
uniform. But the mother said she was not offended, rather she was grateful to Nida for thinking about her son.

The woman with difficult husband (Nasima) said she wanted to give her two boys good nutrition but her family circumstances make it very difficult.
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