

## **The Cultural Context of Women's Productive Invisibility: A Case Study of a Pakistani Village**

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This paper shows that women in Rajpur, a Punjabi village in Pakistan, participate substantially in activities that are productive and are geared directly or indirectly towards producing utilities of some kind. These utilities are both income-generating and/or expenditure-saving. Women are extensively involved in many agricultural and livestock-tending operations, in addition to their involvement in other productive domains such as poultry-tending, processing of dairy products, and handicrafts. Whereas men are working in the city to earn extra cash, women too, are working in pursuit of the same goal. However, women's involvement in these activities remains relatively unrecognised within larger cultural pictures and has not resulted in elevating their status within society. Despite women's productive activities, they are largely projected as domestic and private beings and their roles as home-makers, mothers, and nurturers of children have come to be culturally emphasised to the exclusion of all others. The institutions of purdah and segregation of sexes which confine women and their activities to the private domains and permit men access to the public domains act as effective cultural devices in creating blinders to women's productive roles. This paper contends that the existing dominant cultural images of women and the invisibility of their productive dimensions reflect social values rather than social reality.

### **INTRODUCTION**

A myth of female dependency clouds the perception of active productive roles of rural women in Pakistani society and male heads of the households are reported in national labour statistics as predominantly participating in the maintenance and economic survival of the family. For instance, according to the 1981 population census, unbelievably low labour force participation rates for females

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were reported,<sup>1</sup> reflecting a gross underestimation of women's participation in agricultural and related activities. As a result, rural women in Pakistan have seldom been targeted in rural development programmes and meagre resources have been allocated for rural development projects aimed at them. This raises some very important questions for a country with a population of over 100 million, out of which approximately one-half of the population is female, and where about 70 percent of the people reside in the rural areas: Are women dominantly dependent on the income generated by men alone to run their households? To what extent do they contribute to the sustenance of the family and in what productive domestic and agricultural spheres of activity do women participate? This raises the need to probe into some of the cultural reasons<sup>2</sup> associated with the undermining of women's productive dimensions and activities as these have a crucial link with the relatively low status accorded women *vis-à-vis* men in Pakistani society.

This paper based on extensive research in a Punjabi village in Pakistan attempts to explore answers to some of these questions. It tries to develop, firstly, an understanding of the nature of productive activities women perform within the household and on the farm. Secondly, it delineates some of the culturally conceived notions regarding women, which, despite their active participation in productive activities crucial for the sustenance of the family, make women and their work appear less onerous than men's in the cultural eyes and project them largely as bearers and caretakers of children, and as those who must be protected and provided for.

Productive work, in this study, is taken in its broadest sense as work that is directly or indirectly geared towards producing utilities of some kind. These utilities can be those that are either income-generating and/or expenditure-saving. In household production, for instance, churning milk is both income-generating and expenditure-saving. Butter and shortening that is processed at home not only meet the consumption needs of the household but are also sold to the villagers or in the market for cash. Similarly spinning cotton or jute is also termed productive – the

<sup>1</sup>Rural Labour Force Participation Rates as reported by 1981 Census were 3.0 percent for females and 76.4 percent for males. Percentage of Labour Force by Occupation, by Sex in Pakistan in 1981 in the occupational category (agricultural, animal husbandry and forestry workers, fishermen and hunters) was reported to be 50.12 percent, out of which 48.80 were males and 1.33 were females. In rural areas, 64.21 percent males were reported to be involved in these occupations as opposed to only 1.76 percent females. (Source: Population Census of Pakistan 1981).

<sup>2</sup>Although the low recorded rates of female work participation in Pakistan have been attributed by various social scientists to inadequacies in census-taking techniques, such as definitional problems, conceptual biases of enumeration/enumerators, lack of access of male enumerators to female respondents, etc., cultural perceptions of work which identify men as the main bread-winners have also been identified as contributing largely to the invisibility and, hence, under-reporting of women's economic roles see Abbasi (1982); Afzal (1992) and Shah (1986).

yarn is used not only for weaving bed-spreads and sleeping-cots but may also be sold to others. At the farm, work related to harvesting and processing of crops is also viewed as productive. The processed crops, in addition to being consumed by the household itself, are also income-generating when sold to others for cash, and, again, expenditure-saving if exchanged for other utilities.

The data used in this paper are based on fieldwork conducted in Rajpur – a barani (rain-irrigated) village in District Rawalpindi, located at a distance of approximately 40 kilometres southwest of the capital city, Islamabad. Information on the productive roles of women in agricultural and household activities, in addition to cultural perceptions regarding both males and females and their work, was collected using the techniques of participant observation and in-depth interviewing. Information was gathered through long-term residence in the village (1989–1990). Participant observation which continued throughout the research helped take part in the daily lives of the villagers in general and women in particular – to observe details of work and important events and develop a fuller understanding of the people. Twenty percent of the total number of households were observed<sup>3</sup> and interviewed. In-depth interviews were conducted with male and female heads of the representative households. Questions relating to contributions in agriculture, care of livestock, handicrafts, poultry-tending, and other essential activities relating to family subsistence, provision of food, generation of income, etc., were investigated. Other relevant information was collected through interviews with key informants and village influentials.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

It has been stated that the relative status<sup>4</sup> of sexes is co-related with relative contribution to subsistence within the society. Ethnographic/cross-cultural studies regarding the division of labour between sexes have revealed that in societies where both men and women worked side by side in the production of subsistence goods, the relationship between them was relatively egalitarian – for instance, women in such societies had a certain degree of autonomy and decision-making power and were seen to be active in the political and public domains [Boserup (1979); Engels (1972); Friedl (1975); Leacock (1981); Lee (1979)]. On the other hand, in societies where men monopolised production, they alone dominated all structures of power.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup>A total of thirty households were observed.

<sup>4</sup>The term "status", as argued by some analysts, is too general. In this paper, "status" is held to signify the degree to which women have authority or power in the domestic and/or public domain [Sanday (1975)], and, borrowing from Stoler (1977), it is taken to mean female autonomy – as the extent to which women exercise control over their own lives, as well as returns from their labour *vis-à-vis* men.

<sup>5</sup>For more details, see Friedl (1975).

However, it has been conversely argued that women's participation in subsistence production alone does not automatically result in higher female status; a host of other factors (amongst these, to name a few, are the control over production and the access to tasks considered prestigious from a cultural point of view) contribute towards according a high status to women in society [see Brown (1975); Epstein (1986); Ortner (1974); Reiter (1975); Rosaldo (1974); Sacks (1974) and Sanday (1975)]. Rosaldo, linking the undermined status of women in society to a sharp differentiation between the public and the private spheres of activity, argues that the opposition between the public and the private orientation of males and the domestic orientation of females (because of their biological roles of bearing children and hence caring for them) provides a necessary framework for an examination of male and female roles in society and permits one to isolate those interrelated factors that make women and their activities less culturally valued than men.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the confinement of women to the domestic sphere of activities in contrast to the access of men to the extra-domestic, economic, political, and military spheres of activity is a critical factor in understanding the asymmetrical cultural evaluations of men and women and, therefore, women's lack of social position in society. According to Ortner (1974), the three indicators of secondary cultural evaluations accorded women in a culture are: (1) elements of cultural ideology and informant's statements that explicitly devalue women, treating them, their roles, their tasks, and products as less prestigious than men and their activities; (2) symbolic devices such as attribution of defilement; and (3) social structural arrangements that exclude women from participating in some realm in which the highest powers of the society are felt to reside. These three types of data (which may or may not be related) are reflective of women's secondary status in a given society. In trying to decipher the deep-rooted logic of cultural thinking, which assumes that women and their roles are of a lesser value than men, Ortner asserts that women, on account of their physical, social, and psychological aspects are viewed by cultures as being closer to nature. Firstly, women's physiological, biological, and reproductive functions place them closer to nature in contrast to the physiology of men. Thus, because of women's prolonged bodily involvement in the functions of childbirth, they are relatively constrained to take up the projects of culture; men being free of these physiological constraints are in a relatively advantageous position to take up these projects. They are, hence, considered as being closer to culture. Since culture has the ability to transform – to "socialise" and "culturalise" nature – it is therefore superior. This, according to Ortner, has led cultures to place a lower value on women. Secondly, women's physiological functions in turn place them in social roles that are considered to be of a lower cultural order than the roles men take.

<sup>6</sup>For related perspectives, see De Beauvoir (1953); Chodorow (1979); Gilligan (1979).

These social roles tend to constrain and limit the social movements of women, keeping them confined to the domestic, family, nursing, supervisory, and caretaking roles as mothers. Thirdly, women's social roles in turn give them a psyche (moulded to mothering functions) that makes them appear to be closer to nature. In sum, this nature/culture division accords women a second-class status *vis-à-vis* men.

Keeping within the framework of the public/private, nature/culture, and male/female dichotomy, this paper contends that the cultural projections of women primarily as mothers and nurturers of children and, hence, as those who need to be protected and provided for, are largely connected with the way cultures adapt certain interpretations about the true roles of both men and women in society and view them in certain well-defined masculine and feminine images. Cultures often create devices that lend credence to and help perpetuate the continuity of such interpretations and images. For instance, it is argued, that in village Rajpur, the institutions of *purdah* and segregation of sexes<sup>7</sup> divide the entire village space into two distinct public/male and private/female domains. These institutions act as effective cultural devices<sup>8</sup> in confining women and their productive activities within the private domain. Permeating all levels of society, they hamper women's access to other structures of power such as education, information, employment, and political participation on the one hand [Shaheed (1992)] and, on the other, emphasise upon their natural roles as private beings, and as nurturing mothers. In contrast, these institutions permit men access to the public/cultural domain – the domain of business, exchange, knowledge, and power. This, in effect, clouds the cultural perception of the productive roles women perform within the confines of the domestic/private spheres and makes men and their public roles appear as those of providers and hence of more value.

<sup>7</sup>Although the word "*purdah*" meaning "curtain", in its literal sense is understood as the veiling of women's faces and bodies underneath a cloak (*burqa*). In this study, drawing from Hannah Papanek's definition (1982), the word "*purdah*" is taken to mean a system of secluding women, restricting them from moving freely into public spaces and enforcing high standards of female modesty upon them.

The crucial element of *purdah* according to Papanek is its limitations on interaction between women and men outside certain well-defined categories. Carroll M. C. Pastner (1987), in her study of the status of women and property on a Baluchistan oasis in Pakistan, talks about *purdah* in terms of physical seclusion which requires that women in a Muslim community be severely constrained from economic and other activities taking place outside the home. According to Pastner, one of the definitive features of Muslim *purdah* is that social intercourse between men and women is delimited by the criterion of kinship. In this respect, social access and interaction between men and women is possible only if they are related through blood or marriage.

<sup>8</sup>Authors such as Azari (1983); Jefferey (1979); Mernissi (1987); and Papanek (1982) link female dependency and women's association to the domestic realm of activities to a cultural conception of sexuality and, hence, a prominent cultural concern for the sexual modesty of women. They argue that *purdah* and the segregation of sexes in a society limit women's physical mobility and social contacts and makes them generally dependent on and subordinate to the male members of the family.

The following section of the paper outlines the intensive and extensive involvement of Rajpur women in activities that are productive and are crucial to the economic survival and sustenance of the family.

### THE PRODUCTIVE ACTIVITIES OF WOMEN IN RAJPUR

In Rajpur, as in other villages, land cultivation is a year-round activity. Wheat and pulses are the major crops grown. In addition, maize, barley, peanuts, oilseeds (mustard and *taramira*),<sup>9</sup> and melons are also grown. Wheat is by far the most important crop of the year and the best land is allocated for this crop. Similarly, pulses are also important and constitute part of the daily diet of the villagers. Maize, barley, and mustard are grown mainly as fodder crops. The production and processing of crops require substantial amounts of both time and labour and specialised activities in which women participate considerably alongside men.<sup>10</sup> However, there are some activities performed exclusively by men, some exclusively by women, and others jointly. Table 1 shows the distribution of male/female and joint activities in different stages of crop production and processing. The intensive participation of women in the production, harvesting, and processing of crops is productive in that it also saves money that would otherwise be spent in hiring labour. The processed crops not only meet the household consumption needs but are also income-generating when sold in the market for cash. Harvesting/peak agricultural activity substantially increases the work-load of women who not only have to shoulder the daily burden of housework but also have to provide meals for all those working in the field. Additional labour is often required at this time. Many young boys from within and neighbouring villages offer their services and work on other people's lands on a contractual basis. This contract does not involve payment of money, but instead two full meals for each day of work. The meal usually consists of bread/rice and vegetable curry and occasionally beef curry. Although additional help also means additional work-load (in terms of cooking) for women, it nonetheless saves money that would otherwise be spent in hiring labour for cash (the cost of providing meals is much less as compared to hiring wage labour). Although it is not a common practice for women themselves to work for wages on others' lands, they do sometimes give a helping hand to their relatives, friends, and neighbours (in terms of additional cooking, baby-sitting, harvesting, and processing) as a goodwill gesture during the peak seasons.

<sup>9</sup>A plant whose seeds yield a pungent oil which is used for killing hair lice. *Taramira* is also used as fodder.

<sup>10</sup>All households in the village own land. As observed, women from all except two households were involved in agricultural activities on their farms. The two houses had leased out their land. However, because of the small size of land-holdings, leasing of land is not common.

Table 1  
Distribution of Male-Female and Joint Activities in Crop Production and Processing

Wheat	Maize		Pulses		Mustard/ Taramira/ Sesame Seed		Peanuts		Fodder Crops Millet/Barley	
	EM	Ploughing	EM	Ploughing	EM	Ploughing	EM	Ploughing	EM	Ploughing
Ploughing	EM	Ploughing	EM	Ploughing	EM	Ploughing	EM	Ploughing	EM	Ploughing
Spreading Manure	MF	Spreading Manure	MF	Spreading Manure	MF	Spreading Manure	MF	Spreading Manure	MF	Spreading Manure
Sowing	PM	Sowing	PM	Sowing	PM	Sowing	PM	Sowing	PM	Sowing
Harvesting	MF	Harvesting	MF	Harvesting	MF	Harvesting	PF	Harvesting	MF	Harvesting
Weeding	PF	Stacking	MF	Beating	PF	Beating/ Separating Seeds	EF	Separating Shells	MF	
Threshing	MF	Peeling	MF	Winnowing at Home	EF	Winnowing	EF	Threshing	MF	
Winnowing	EM	Threshing	MF	Packing/ Transporting	MF	Packing/ Transporting	MF	Removing Stubs	MF	
Packing/ Transporting	MF	Drying	PF	Sifting	EF	Trans. to Mills	EM	Packing/ Transporting	MF	

Continued -

Table 1 – (Continued)

	Wheat	Maize	Pulses	Mustard/ Taramira/ Sesame Seed	Peanuts	Fodder Crops Millett/Barley
Collecting Chaff and Hay	MF Winnowing at Home	EF Winnowing at EF Home	Storing	EF Storing	EF Roasting	EF
Winnowing at Home	EF Packing/ Transporting	MF Transporting	Trans. to City/Selling	EM Trans to. City/Selling	EM Storing	EF
Storing	EF	Storing	EF		Trans to. City/Selling	EM
Trans. to City/Selling	EM City/Selling	Trans. to City/Selling	EM			

Source: Author's fieldwork.

Legend: EM Exclusively Male.

PM Predominantly Male.

MF Male Female.

PF Predominantly Female.

EF Exclusively Female



Besides agriculture, women also make a significant contribution towards the caring of livestock, which forms an important part of the village economy and is vital for agricultural purposes and for sustenance.<sup>11</sup> Table 2 shows the distribution of male, female, and joint activities in livestock-tending.

Table 2

*Distribution of Male, Female, and Joint Activities in Livestock-tending*

Sr. No.	Activities Performed	
1.	Grazing	EM
2.	Bathing	EM
3.	Milking	PM
4.	Harvesting Fodder	PF
5.	Chopping Fodder	MF
6.	Preparation of Cattle Feed	MF
7.	Feeding in Manger	MF
8.	Cleaning of Cattle Shed	EF
9.	Disposal of Dung	EF
10.	Heating Milk	EF
11.	Churning Milk	EF
12.	Processing Butter into Ghee	EF
13.	Selling Milk or Ghee within the Village	PF
14.	Selling Livestock within/outside the Village	PM

Source: Author's fieldwork.

Legend: EM Exclusively Male.  
 PM Predominantly Male.  
 MF Male Female.  
 PF Predominantly Female.  
 EF Exclusively Female.

<sup>11</sup>See Freedman and Wai's (1988) *Gender and Development in Barani Areas of Pakistan*. The study documents in detail the intensive participation of women in crop production and livestock operations, and the income generated by women from the sale of livestock and its products in the barani villages of the Punjab and the North West Frontier Province.

As indicated in the table, the activities of grazing and bathing livestock are performed exclusively by men since these activities take place outside the compound of the house. Other activities related to livestock-tending fall primarily into the hands of women. Cows, sheep and goats are an important source of milk and meat. Milk, butter and *ghee* (clarified butter), apart from being consumed at home, are also sold within and outside the village to generate additional cash. Cow-dung is used as manure and is also mixed in mud to plaster floors, roofs, and court-yards and to make clay ovens. In addition, some women also raise goats/sheep for others on a contractual basis. This contract varies from household to household. In some case, women use the milk for daily consumption and the droppings as manure. The goat, when mature and ready to be sold, is returned to the owner. In most other cases, however, women are entitled to half the money at the time when the goat is sold for cash.

In addition to agriculture and livestock-tending, small items of utility and domestic use are made in almost every household in Rajpur. Girls are initiated into the arts of embroidery, sewing and stitching, and handicrafts such as weaving cots, *azarbands*,<sup>12</sup> and *parandas*<sup>13</sup> at an early age. These form important items of a girl's dowry – made at home, they eliminate additional expenditure of buying these items from the market. Poultry is also raised by women on a small scale and is another good source of additional income. Eggs are both consumed within the home and sold to other villagers. Chicken meat is cooked on festive occasions for entertaining guests.

Numerous other activities which can be termed as productive are performed by women in addition to the ones explained above. These include collection of fire-wood, renovation and plastering of houses, construction of clay ovens, pickle and vermicelli making etc. These activities are productive in that they save money which would otherwise be spent in obtaining these items or services from outside.

Table 3 shows the sequence of productive and other activities performed in off-peak season (a day outside the peak sowing and harvesting season) in one of the households in Rajpur. This particular household comprises 4 members. Father, Raju, is a retired army soldier. He now takes care of his land and livestock together with his wife and two children, a son and a daughter. The size of his land-holding is approximately 2 acres. In addition to the land, Raju owns a pair of oxen, 2 cows, 4 goats, and 6 chicken.

The entire family works hard together to eke out a living. However, each person is responsible for performing specific tasks. Raju is mainly responsible for milking the cows, feeding the animals and taking them out for grazing on commer-

<sup>12</sup>A narrow cotton belt, used for tying trousers to the waist.

<sup>13</sup>A tape with three strands used for tying hair into braids.

Table 3

*Sequence of Activities Performed during Off-Peak Season*

Time	Mother 40 Yrs	Father 45 Yrs	Son 15 Yrs	Daughter 14 Yrs
5-7 a.m.	Wakes up. Goes to the field to defecate/toilet. Folds bedding. Kneads flour. Lights oven. Makes tea.	Wakes up. Goes to the field to defecate/toilet. Milks cows. (P)	Wakes up. Goes to the field to defecate/toilet. Gets ready for school	Wakes up. Goes to the field to defecate/toilet. Sweeps court-yard. Cleans poultry shed. (P)
7-9 a.m.	Bakes bread. Serves breakfast. Eats breakfast. Feeds chicken. (P) Cleans cattle-shed. (P)	Eats breakfast. Prepares cattle feed. (P) Feeds cattle. (P)	Eats breakfast. Helps father in fodder preparation. (P) Goes to school.	Eats breakfast. Washes dishes. Sweeps rooms.
9-11 a.m.	Cleans cattle-shed. (P) Disposes cattle dung in the fields. (P) Goes to the field to harvest fodder. (P) Pulls out weeds. (P)	Takes cattle for grazing. (P)	At school	Fetches water from the well. Accompanies mother to the fields. Harvests fodder. (P) Collects fire-wood. (P)
11 a.m. - 1p.m.	Collects fire-wood. (P) Carries home fodder and fire- wood. (P) Lights oven. Eats roti (baked bread). Chops fodder. (P)	Cattle grazing. (P)	At school.	Carries home fire- wood and fodder. (P) Makes tea. Eats roti. Washes dishes.
1-3 p.m.	Stacks fire-wood. (P) Rests. Cleans utensils.	Cattle grazing. (P)	At school. Returns home.	Visits neighbours. Returns home. Feeds chicken. (P) Weaves Azarband. (P)
3-5 p.m.	Lights oven. Makes tea. Prepares cattle- feed. (P) Cooks lentils. Kneads flour.	Returns home. Drinks tea. Rests.	Drinks tea. Goes out with friends.	Washes dishes. Fetches water.
5-7 p.m.	Bakes bread. Serves dinner. Unfolds bedding. Arranges sleeping cots.	Has dinner. Feeds cattle. (P) Milks cows. (P)	Has dinner. Helps father feed cattle. (P)	Has dinner. Washes dishes.
7-9 p.m.	Knits sweater. (P) Sleeps.	Sleeps.	Visits friends. Sleeps.	Weaves Azarband. (P) Sleeps.

Source: Author's fieldwork.

(P) = Productive work.

cial pastures outside the village. His son, Jojo, helps his father with the care of the livestock but spends a larger part of his daily time at school. Mother, Bano, is primarily incharge of the kitchen but also makes a significant contribution towards the care of the livestock. Her set of tasks include harvesting, chopping/preparing fodder for the animals, and cleaning the cattle shed. Daughter, Gufta, helps her mother a great deal with house and animal work. Physical constraints limit additional responsibilities which she will eventually take on as she gets older.

During off-peak seasons, both Bano and her daughter take some time off to relax. Chatting with friends, visiting relatives and neighbours, and resting are leisure activities, performed when more free time is available.

Peak agricultural season alters the daily household routine and increases considerably the work-load of all members of the household, including Bano and Gufta, leaving little or no time for relaxation and leisure. The following table (Table 4) shows the work schedule of Bano's household during the peak agricultural season.

As indicated by the table, peak agricultural season requires both intensive labour and long working hours in the field. The day is started earlier than the normal schedule so that maximum time is devoted to agricultural operations. At the same time, daily chores have to be attended to as well. Father (Raju) requests his neighbour's ten year-old son to take the cattle out for grazing after school. This allows him to spend maximum time in the field. Jojo's labour is very crucial but he must also attend school, which starts and ends early during the harvesting season. (Village schools often make such provisions during peak agricultural seasons to discourage absenteeism, which is otherwise quite common at such times). Upon returning home, Jojo helps his parents with agricultural work.

Mother Bano puts in 7-8 hours of harvesting work in the field in addition to attending to her daily chores such as cooking, cleaning, and livestock-tending. Raju puts in 9 hours of work in the field but is relieved of his responsibility of grazing the animals. Both Jojo and Gufta put in 4 hours of work each.

Despite the intensive involvement of women in the above-mentioned domains of work, they are viewed as playing insignificant roles in terms of providing sustenance to the family. The following section of the paper deals with some of the dominant cultural notions of women which are related to the undermining of their productive roles.

### **PUBLIC/PRIVATE, NATURE/CULTURE, MALE/FEMALE DOMAINS IN RAJPUR**

The depiction of women as playing passive or insignificant roles, the over-emphasis of their roles as mothers and wives, and an underestimation of their

Table 4

*Sequence of Activities during Peak Agriculture Season*

Time	Mother 40 Yrs	Father 45 Yrs	Son 15 Yrs	Daughter 14 Yrs
4-6 a.m.	Wakes up. Goes to the field to defecate/toilet. Folds bedding. Bakes bread. Makes tea.	Wakes up. Goes to the field to defecate/toilet. Milks cows. (P)	Wakes up. Goes to the field to defecate/toilet.	Wakes up. Goes to the field to defecate/toilet. Kneads flour. Lights oven.
6-8 a.m.	Serves breakfast. Eats breakfast. Cleans cattle-shed. (P)	Eats breakfast. Prepares cattle feed. (P) Feeds cattle. (P) Goes to the field.	Eats breakfast. Goes to school.	Eats breakfast. Sweeps court-yard. Cleans poultry shed. (P) Washes dishes. Fetches water.
8-10 a.m.	Disposes cow dung. (P) Goes to the field. Harvests wheat. (P)	Harvests wheat. (P)	At school.	Feeds chicken. (P) Goes to the field to chop fodder. Chops fodder. (P)
10 a.m. -12 noon	Harvests wheat. (P)	Harvests wheat. (P)	At school	Harvests wheat. (P)
12 noon -2 p.m.	Carries home fodder. (P) Lights oven. Bakes bread. Carries bread and butter, milk to the fields for husband. Eats lunch.	Harvests wheat. (P) Eats lunch	Returns home. Eats lunch	Carries home fodder. (P) Kneads flour. Eats lunch. Washes dishes.
2-4 p.m.	Harvests wheat. (P)	Harvests wheat. (P) Rests. Harvests wheat. (P)	Goes to the field. Harvests wheat. (P)	Harvests wheat. (P)
4-6 p.m.	Rests. Harvests wheat. (P) Returns home. Prepares cattle- feed. (P)	Harvest wheat. (P) Returns home.	Harvests wheat. (P)	Returns home. Fetches water. Cuts vegetables.
6-8 p.m.	Cooks vegetables. Bakes bread. Serves and eats dinner.	Feeds cattle. (P) Eats dinner.	Returns home. Eats dinner. Milks cows. (P)	Kneads flour. Lights oven. Eats dinner Washes dishes.
8-10 p.m.	Makes tea. Chats with neighbour. Sleeps.	Has tea. Sleeps.	Has tea. Sleeps.	Has tea. Sleeps.

Source: Author's fieldwork.

(P) = Productive work.

productive contributions are aspects not of their invisibility but distorted visibility. The problem, thus, lies not with the invisibility of women but in the distortions of their visibility and the assumption of their derived identity and status [Ardner (1986)].

In Rajpur, the dominant cultural perceptions regarding women revolve mainly around their biological attributes of reproduction. These attributes are not only seen as a rationalisation for the existing division of labour but are also seen as according a different psyche to women – one that is suited to performing roles centring around the home and family and requiring minimal interaction with the outside world. Women on account of these attributes are perceived predominantly as biologically vulnerable beings; as home-makers, producers and care-takers of children; and as those relatively deficient in the faculty of reasoning and intellect “*samhaj* and *aql*” – the two qualities thought to be of crucial importance in dealing effectively with the public world. Interestingly, views regarding women are in sharp contrast to those held regarding men who are culturally visible in such roles as the managers of women, of the outside world, and ones consequently ordained with the mental capacities to take charge and develop links with the public domain. The division of the village into distinct male/female domains substantiates these views and embeds them deeply into the cultural psyche. These domains are conceptually and ideally much more separated and distinct than what, in reality, appears to be. Although as pointed out in the paper, women work alongside men in many domains such as seasonal agricultural activities and day-to-day livestock-tending, yet these domains have a distinct division of labour within them. (There are some tasks performed exclusively by men while others exclusively by women.) The interesting aspect of this division is that it is based less on the physical differences of muscular strength between men and women but more on the way culture views their biology and biological propensities – for instance, women are barred from activities such as grazing and ploughing, not because they are thought to be lacking the physical strength to perform these activities but because it is believed that a woman’s ploughing in the field alone and grazing animals away from the village compound, especially during late hours, makes her physically vulnerable, in terms of her natural, biological capacities of conception and reproduction. Similarly women are barred from many other tasks such as winnowing wheat in the open (the process of winnowing inside the house is performed exclusively by women), climbing trees to pull down leaves or branches for fuel, which may draw attention of *unrelated* men and hence make women visible in their eyes. Girls from a young age are encouraged to take part in sports that are sedentary and in-doors and which do not draw the attention of males towards them, hence keeping their activities private. Boys, on the other hand, play rigorous games, mostly outside the compound of the house. This, often, is the preliminary step to future sex role differentiation and prescribing

of male/female activities within the distinctive public/private spheres.

Since the female is considered as more vulnerable (to male advances), her social behaviour and activities are intricately tied to the "honour and shame" of the family [Ahmad (1986); Mandelbaum (1988); Vatuk (1982)]. Guarding the vulnerability of women, hence, becomes an issue of immense concern to the villagers. They are expected to conform to certain codes/ideals of modesty, certain behaviour restrictions, especially in terms of their visibility in the public domains and in their interaction with *unrelated* males, in addition to performing only specific activities and work considered appropriate for them. The need for restricting women's mobility arises because, relatively, there are no restrictions on the mobility of men. So that the two sexes will remain segregated and not freely interact, it is the mobility of women that must be restricted – it is widely believed that "man is the hunter and woman the prey".

The segregation of sexes which divides the village into the male and female space, gives it a public/private connotation. All male space is public while the female space is private. In this respect, the home and its compound represents the private domain, whereas the village streets, shops, etc., represent the public – the domain of men.

It is crucial to point out that while the connotation of the house remains purely private, as a place where the vulnerability of the females is well-protected, the village oscillates between the public and the private, depending upon the time of the day. Hence, space is used by both men and women at different times in different ways. Whereas streets remain public irrespective of time, agricultural fields take on a private connotation during the day-time, when women must perform their daily agricultural and livestock-tending activities, and they become public (and prohibited for women) again during the night. Since a majority of men step out of the village in the morning to work in the city or to graze cattle, women have more mobility within the village which permits them to perform their daily chores effectively. Similarly, the village ponds where women bathe and do their laundry take on a private connotation during the daylight hours but become public (accessible to men only) during the night. (All village ponds are for the use of women alone; men bathe in ponds outside the village.) A woman entering male spaces such as the streets, with a basket full of cow dung (to be disposed of in the fields) or a pot full of water (drawn from the village well) on her head, has a legitimate reason to do so during the day but is otherwise viewed as provocative and, hence, vulnerable. As the day turns into night, all space outside the compound of the house becomes restricted for women. However, certain concessions for legitimate outside activity are available despite restrictions – for instance, women are often seen going to the fields at night to defecate in groups of three to four. The formation of these female groups makes women appear more private and less vulnerable, neutralising the

public connotation of space. This permits women to go about their business privately in the otherwise public spaces.

Figures 1 and 2 show the changing public/private connotation of the village.

Women on the basis of their private and natural images are viewed as those "who look good within the house". The house, apart from having a private connotation, epitomises other meanings as well – a house is a place where one satisfies one's primary and material needs for shelter, food, rest, and sex. On the other hand, the public space, which is removed from the house, is where men satisfy their secondary/material and cultural needs such as social contacts, business and economic transactions, and entertainment.<sup>14</sup>

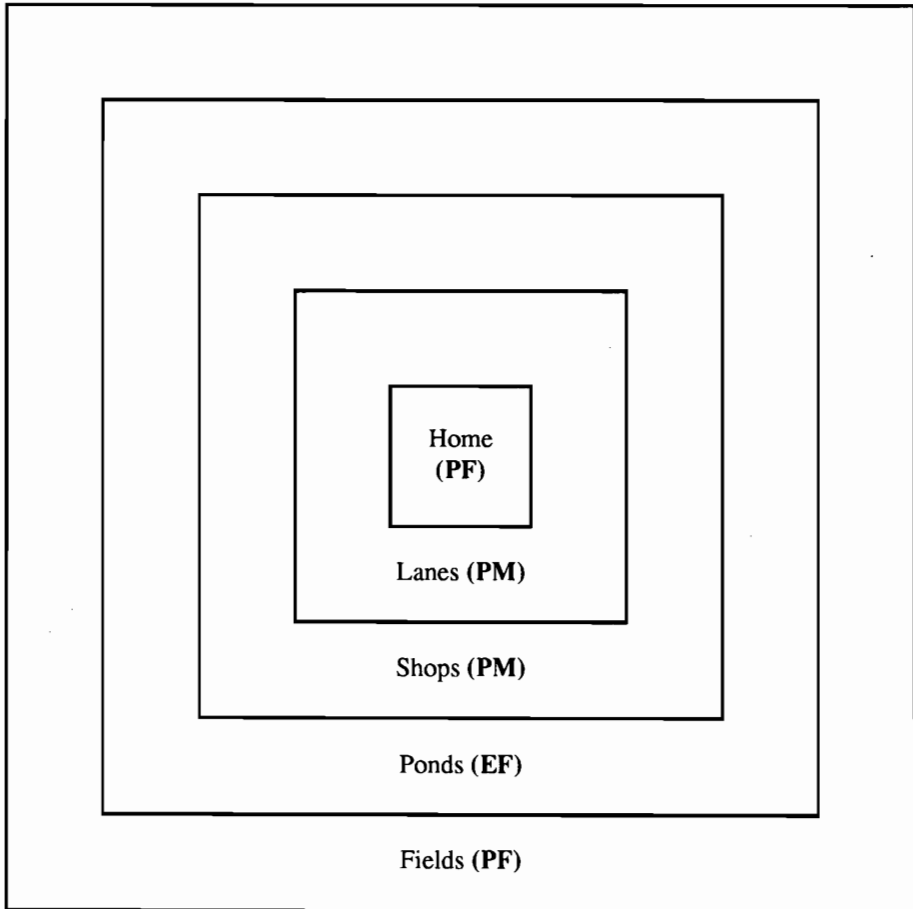
The house is a symbol of femininity where only females should be seen. The outside world represents the male world and, therefore, masculinity dictates that a man spend most of his time outside the house as doing otherwise subjects him to social ridicule and gives him a feminine image – the image of passivity. The house and the women, therefore, are very much alike, as both satisfy the basic needs. The house is where one eats food – the women cook the food. The house is where the man comes to satisfy his needs for sex with his partner – the wife becomes the channel. Similarly, the house is where one comes after detaching oneself from the outside world of knowledge, public contact, and exchange – women are viewed as already detached from these domains.

This spatial division according to sex also reflects a certain allocation of power and is, thus, hierarchical – it is a division between those who hold power and authority and those who do not. Since men are permitted access to the public domain, working for wages is culturally perceived as a male prerogative and remains the domain of men *par excellence*. Not only that, all other domains involving any kind of financial transactions outside the domestic realm are also monopolised by men. Although women work alongside men in most of the processes involved in the production of crops, yet men take over as the crop is processed and made ready for sale, as they alone are permitted access to the world of business and exchange. Ironically both the credit and returns for the finished commodities go to the person who makes the sale. Although, as observed, women are involved extensively in activities relating to the care of livestock, they cannot buy or sell animals in the market. All monetary transactions are conducted by and amongst men and payment is made to the male heads of the households "even for work done by women" [Shaheed (1992), p. v]. Women are culturally constrained to confine production and productive activities within the private domain and not transgress these boundaries. Sale of utilities and contacts outside the domestic realm necessi-

<sup>14</sup>See Ali (1986) for some interesting parallels in her study of male and female spheres in a Pakistani village.



DAY TIME

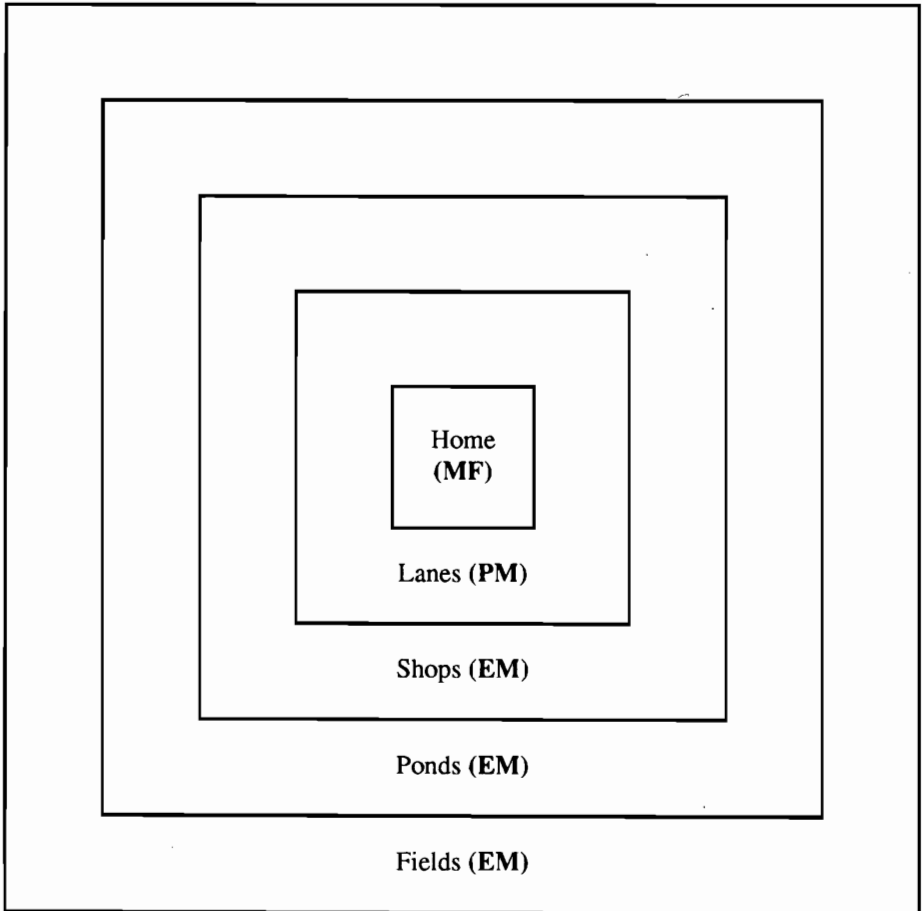


Source: Author's fieldwork.

Legend: EM Exclusively Male.  
PM Predominantly Male.  
MF Male Female.  
PF Predominantly Female.  
EF Exclusively Female.

Fig. 1. The Changing Public/Private, Male/Female Connotation of the Village during Different Times of the Day.

## NIGHT TIME



Source: Author's fieldwork.

Legend: EM Exclusively Male.  
 PM Predominantly Male.  
 MF Male Female.  
 PF Predominantly Female.  
 EF Exclusively Female.

**Fig. 2. The Changing Public/Private, Male/Female Connotation of the Village during Different Times of the Day.**

tates the presence of a male, since he is the only one who has access to the public world. Women do not have any more opportunities to earn cash other than the paltry amounts they earn from selling such items as eggs, milk, and handicrafts within the village.<sup>15</sup>

Risks associated with women's public interaction and activity, in terms of their physical vulnerability and the family's honour, further constrain women to the private domain, taking away from them the control over the utilities they produce and thrusting it into the hands of men. Women's economic subjugation contained in the lack of control over economic sources and restrictions on working for wages persuades them of the importance of men's work and of the trivialness of their own. The income men earn from the cities gives them an upper hand over women. Men, aware of the importance of their cash-earning privileges, use this as a tool to monopolise their worth and power in the household. This earning power makes men appear in the cultural picture as the only providers, and leads to the erroneous assumption that all females of the household are economically dependent on them.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, women are conditioned into finding gratification not in roles as earners but in their culturally idealised roles as mothers and bearers of children, and into considering the incompatibility of these roles with the public domain. Hence, women who *indulge* in work outside their houses and in other entrepreneurial activities involving public interaction are seen as performing activities which are in contradiction to what they must ideally personify – a home-maker, a good cook, and a devoted nurturing mother. Women are predominantly valorised in their natural functions and, at each stage of their lives, are viewed in terms of their biological propensities which have a specific role to fulfil. For instance, women are perceived as chaste daughters/sisters, fertile wives and nurturing mothers. Punishments and social rewards available to women are inextricably linked to their natural biological propensities. Marriage prospects of a girl are jeopardised if she does not come up to the culturally prescribed standards of chastity and modesty. Similarly, marriage is threatened if a wife is unable to fulfil her natural procreative roles as a mother. Motherhood is a prelude to future happiness. Proverbially, "Heaven lies under the feet of mothers" – that is, for those who have successfully fulfilled their natural

<sup>15</sup>These items are sold on demand or whenever a need arises. There is no regular clientele for these items.

<sup>16</sup>Women were culturally conditioned into thinking that the gains from working in the city were much more than working in the field and taking care of their livestock. The income of men working in the city for wages/salary (a large number were serving in the Pakistan Army) is comparatively steady (although not always greater) as compared to the income generated by the sale of livestock and agricultural produce. This further enhances the importance of men's work. In addition, natural calamities such as lack or excess of rain may effect the yield of crops. Similarly, unforeseen circumstances, such as death or occasional theft of livestock, also make income from the city more valuable.

child-bearing functions. Thus, a woman who engages in the public-sphere activities is one who, in the cultural thinking, is missing out or at least not carrying out effectively the activities that she must learn as part of her identity as a female.<sup>17</sup> Most importantly, in the cultural thinking, a woman engaging visibly in earning activities reflects negatively on the male head of the household, casting him as a poor provider. Masculinity which is understood in terms of the capacity to earn an income, as stated earlier, is thought to be the prerogative of men. Therefore, a man who lets the women of his household engage in outside economic activity is exposing his inability to provide effectively. Women's financial pursuits in visibly public domains are, therefore, viewed as an outcome of adverse economic conditions. Purdah and veiling and women's lack of involvement in economic activities come to be viewed as luxuries only the financially affluent can afford. These luxuries then become cultural ideals that men aspire for – for their women; as they reflect positively on their image as good earners and, hence, on their masculinity.

Because of women's biological propensities and fundamental, reproductive roles, they are perceived as effectively performing tasks and social roles centred around the family and home. The tasks assigned women, although important for the smooth functioning of the household, do not enhance their relative cultural worth. For instance, women may find gratification in their roles as home-makers, and may even be in some respects mistresses of their compound, but this domestic power does not get translated into social power and prestige which the public sphere embodies. They remain responsible for tasks that are monotonous, repetitive, and keep them confined to their houses and villages, limiting their contacts within the kin group. Not only that, women in the cultural eyes are seen as incapable of dealing with the outside world – world which, according to men, requires intellect and reasoning (*aql* and *samhaj*),<sup>18</sup> the two qualities in which women are thought to be comparatively lacking. They are, hence, kept away from the public world “for their own good”. Men, on the other hand, in their traditional, cultural images as *mijazi khuda* (worldly, imaginary gods) and *maliks* (masters), guardians, protectors and providers, and as those possessing greater *aql* are allowed not only to dominate women but also other structures of power outside the home.

Because of the above-mentioned dominant cultural images, males come to be culturally more valued. In this respect, the birth of a boy is a harbinger of happiness and an occasion of greater joy and celebration than the birth of a girl. A woman

<sup>17</sup>See Goddard (1987) for some interesting parallels in her study of working-class women in Naples.

<sup>18</sup>Naqvi (1986), highlights some interesting views of western philosophers regarding women. Some of the views which Naqvi believes have an element of condescension towards women have come to be accepted as almost universal truths and have sunk into man's subconscious.

bearing sons is considered lucky and is viewed as one who is “blessed” and on whom God has been gracious. Although daughters are considered “good things” by their parents, a number of factors justify the parents’ wish for a male child. These factors also account for the preferential treatment males are likely to receive in different kinship roles as sons, brothers, husbands, and fathers. This preferential treatment is often rationalised in terms of being God-ordained and is manifested in the celebration of the birth ceremony. *Aqiqah*, in which, according to the Islamic injunctions, it is incumbent upon the parents to sacrifice, in the name of God, two rams for a boy and only one for a girl. This practice has as its symbolic content certain ideas about maleness and femaleness which are collectively recognised and, in turn, embedded further and deeply into the minds of the actors. The practice, as reported by the respondents, conveys that the divine instruction of sacrificing two rams for a boys denotes that they are to become the future bread-winners of the family and a source of financial security. On the other hand, the sacrifice of one ram for a girl is understood as a financial concession granted to the parents by God, since the girl is to become nothing but a financial liability and is the one who is born with a “mouth to feed”. The birth of a daughter adds considerably to the parents’ financial concerns, especially regarding her dowry, which they will have to provide at the time of her marriage.<sup>19</sup> Daughters are referred as “*vehray de chiryan*”, i.e., “birds of a courtyard”, or as “*parae*”, those who belong to someone else. Another widely used term for daughters is *mizman/mehman*, guests. Such phrases, also widely used in Pakistani folk/wedding songs, signify the transience of their stay in their parents’ house. They are like birds who flock into one’s courtyard, peck on the grain and, having done so, fly away, giving nothing in return – like guests who come for a visit and then go away to their respective destinations. Sons are considered “*apna*”, “one’s own” as opposed to “*paraya*” – “someone else’s”. Furthermore, it is only sons who can perpetuate the lineage. Parents shudder at the thought of being labeled as “*autra*”, tailless – without sons. Sons are also considered as a source of old-age protection and shelter, apart from providing financial security. Women with sons have a “place to go to” in their old age when they lose their husbands. Since daughters are given away and are “*parae*”, they are in no position to offer any kind of support to the aging parents. Having a son means that the “doors always remain open” for the parents in old age.

Despite the dominant cultural interpretations which cast women as depen-

<sup>19</sup>One of my male respondents verbalised his concern about this issue in the following statement:

“Daughters are good things, if it had not been for their dowry – you know, this is the difference between sons and daughters. Sons fill up their parents’ houses. They bring home money and, when they get married, their brides bring in dowry – and girls, they just empty their parents’ houses, otherwise they are good things. If we did not have to give them dowry...”

dent, domestic beings and as those ordained with the biology and, hence, the psyche to perform effectively the roles of mothering and nurturing children, the fact remains that men in reality are not the only "protectors and providers" within the household. Such interpretations foster a kind of blindness to those roles that do not fit into the cultural ideals, or are seen as jeopardising the traditional role recognition. It has been argued that in societies where the authority of males is embodied in the ability to provide for their families, women are more likely to be valorised in their dependent, natural, maternal, and care-taking roles. Thus, any economic endeavour on the part of the women will be seen as a loss of male status and as an attack on the acknowledged allocation of power [Mernissi (1987)]. In addition, such endeavours are likely to be viewed as the transcendence of females from the "natural" to the "cultural", from the "private" to the "public", and consequently from the subordinate to the powerful. As a result, the productive contributions of women are likely to be sifted through cultural blinders and only men projected in the larger cultural pictures as the main bread-winners, protectors, and providers.

## CONCLUSION

In Pakistan, there remains a crucial need for reliable and accurate data on female labour force participation as well as on the nature of the activities performed by rural women. The recognition of women's work as essential to subsistence and as an increasingly critical factor in agricultural production is missing from the work of development planners [Rogers (1979)]; agricultural and rural development programmes in the past have been directed predominantly towards men. This has resulted largely due to the lack of recognition and reporting of women's productive contributions. This paper has attempted to outline comprehensively the productive activities performed by women in a Pakistani village and provides baseline data regarding women's involvement in agriculture and livestock activities, which are crucial to the sustenance of the family.

Although this research does not account for regional or intra-regional variations (degree of proximity or isolation from towns or urban centres, restrictions and prevailing norms regarding women's mobility, etc.), which may be related in varying degrees to the work of both men and women in rural areas, it suggests that knowledge about rural women and of their participation in both agricultural production and management is essential for the planning and implementation directed towards rural development. Misrepresentations and inadequacies of data regarding women, on which development planning is based, not only have a detrimental effect on women themselves, but also on the subsistence agricultural and livestock sectors in which women participate considerably. It is hoped that the information provided about the realities of women's lives and work will help raise conscious-

ness about women as productive members of society, beyond the cultural projections of their reproductive and domestic roles.

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