



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**A SOCIO-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE OF WOMEN EDUCATION AND
EMPOWERMENT IN RURAL BANGLADESH**

MST SULTANA.

FEM 2006 1

**A SOCIO-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE OF WOMEN EDUCATION AND
EMPOWERMENT IN RURAL BANGLADESH**

By

MST. SULTANA

**Thesis Submitted for the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfilment of the Requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

February 2006



DEDICATION

To My Family and To the World's Women Whose Struggles Are Yet To Be Told



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment
of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**A SOCIO-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE OF WOMEN EDUCATION AND
EMPOWERMENT IN RURAL BANGLADESH**

By

MST. SULTANA

February 2006

Chairman : Professor Jayum Anak Jawan, PhD

Faculty : Human Ecology

The main focus of this study was to examine the role of education in increasing the level of women's empowerment particularly in the decision-making process at the household level and to find out how the socio-cultural factors (for gender-based awareness and the use of *Purdah*-related norms) influence women's education as well as empowerment in rural Bangladesh. The study was conducted in one of the districts of Dinajpur in Bangladesh. Three villages namely, Mashimpur, Mohiskotha and Jugibari which are situated under the Union of Auliapur at Sadar thana (sub-district) were chosen as study areas. The respondents of the study consisted of 340 women from the selected areas. To gather qualitative information, 27 respondents were also involved in this study. In order to gather the depth information, both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed in this study.

The first objective of the study was to examine the awareness of gender-based factors in rural women's education as well as their empowerment. The study

showed that in Bangladesh, socio-cultural ideology generates gender-based inequalities in education. As a result of the patriarchal ideology, most respondents consider sons as ‘assets’. On the other hand, daughters are treated as non-permanent family members in their natal home since they will move into their husband’s house after marriage. Due to such beliefs and practices, women received less attention in education and as a result lack empowerment.

The second objective of the study was to identify the role of the practice of *Purdah*-related norms and its influence on rural women’s education as well as their empowerment. The results indicated that in Bangladesh most respondents had a ‘non-traditional’ ideology or non-conservative ideology about the practice of *Purdah*. Correlation coefficient was also conducted to examine the relationship between respondent’s *Purdah* ideology and the socio-economic variables and the results showed that among the socio-economic variables religious status, education, occupation, income, total number of children and son’s education were positively correlated with *Purdah* awareness although the strength of the relationship was weak.

The third objective of the study was to examine the role of education and how education might help in increasing women’s decision-making power (empowerment) at the household level. The results showed that women with higher education level i.e. those with higher secondary education and graduates, had more decision-making power compared to illiterate, primary and secondary educated women. Similarly, it was found that the women who full-time employed had more

decision-making power than housewives and self-employed women. The findings also showed that respondent's educational attainment ($r = 0.47$; $p < 0.01$), occupation ($r = 0.61$; $p < 0.01$) and income ($r = 0.60$; $p < 0.01$) were positively related to their decision-making power.

The fourth objective of the study was to determine the factors (particularly the independent variables) that might affect women's decision-making power (empowerment) at the household level. A multiple linear regression analysis was carried out and the results revealed that education, occupation, income and gender-based awareness had a significant influence on women's decision-making power (the level of empowerment). The analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed the overall significant of the linear regression model with F-test ($p < 0.001$) for considerable adjustment of the model with the regression coefficient (R square) of 51.6. Overall, the study suggests that improvement in women's access to education particularly the higher level of education opportunities would increase women's employment and income. This could expand their ability to make decisions in the family and would play a key role in the empowerment of rural women.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**PERSPEKTIF SOSIAL BUDAYA DALAM PENDIDIKAN WANITA DAN
PENDAYAUPAYAAN DI LUAR BANDAR BANGLADESH**

Oleh

MST. SULTANA

Februari 2006

Pengerusi : Professor Jayum Anak Jawan, PhD

Fakulti : Ekologi Manusia

Fokus utama kajian ini adalah untuk menilai peranan pendidikan dalam meningkatkan pendayaupayaan wanita dalam proses membuat keputusan di peringkat keluarga dan melihat bagaimana faktor sosial-budaya (iaitu yang melibatkan ketidaksamaan berdasarkan gender dan norma-norma berkaitan amalan pemakaian *purdah*) mempengaruhi pendidikan dan pendayaupayaan wanita di luar bandar Bangladesh. Kajian ini dibuat di daerah Dinajpur, Bangladesh. Tiga buah kampung dipilih, iaitu Mashimpur, Mohiskotha dan Jagibari yang terletak dibawah Gabungan Auliapur di Sadar thana (sub-daerah) sebagai kawasan kajian. Responden kajian pula terdiri daripada 340 wanita dari kawasan kajian yang terpilih. Data-data kajian diperolehi melalui borang soal-selidik, temubual, dan perbincangan fokus serta melalui pemerhatian. Kedua-dua teknik kualitatif dan kuantitatif digunakan di dalam kajian ini, bertujuan untuk mendapatkan maklumat yang lebih terperinci.

Objektif pertama kajian ini adalah untuk menilai pengaruh ketidaksamaan berdasarkan gender dalam pendidikan wanita serta pendayaupayaan mereka. Kajian menunjukkan di Bangladesh, ideologi sosial-budaya menimbulkan ketidaksamaan dalam pendidikan. Kesan daripada ideologi patriakal ini menyebabkan kebanyakan wanita beranggapan bahawa anak lelaki adalah satu 'aset'. Manakala, anak-anak perempuan di layan sebagai ahli sementara keluarga asal kerana andaian bahawa mereka akhirnya akan mengikuti keluarga pihak suami apabila berkahwin kelak. Disebabkan oleh kepercayaan dan amalan sebegini, wanita kurang diberi perhatian dalam pendidikan dan akibatnya mereka kurang pendayaupayaan.

Objektif kedua kajian pula ialah untuk mengenalpasti peranan amalan berkaitan pemakaian *Purdah* dan kesan-kesannya terhadap pendidikan wanita serta pendayaupayaan mereka. Kajian menunjukkan amalan berkaitan pemakaian *purdah* tidak banyak mempengaruhi pendidikan wanita serta kurangnya pendayaupayaan dikalangan mereka. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa *purdah* bukan sahaja dilihat sebagai 'kepercayaan agama' tetapi juga dilihat sebagai norma-norma 'sosio-budaya'; iaitu 'pengasingan wanita' dan 'status keluarga'. Didapati juga bahawa, di Bangladesh kebanyakan wanita memiliki ideologi 'non-tradisional' atau ideologi 'non-konservatif' terhadap amalan pemakain *Purdah*.

Objektif ketiga kajian adalah untuk menilai peranan pendidikan dan bagaimana pendidikan boleh meningkatkan tahap pendayaupayaan (kuasa membuat keputusan). Untuk mengukur tahap pendayaupayaan, kuasa membuat keputusan wanita di peringkat keluarga turut dipertimbangkan di dalam kajian, dan ia di ukur

menggunakan kedua-dua kaedah kualitatif dan kuantitatif. Kajian menilai kuasa membuat keputusan wanita pada setiap peringkat pendidikan yang berbeza dan hasilnya menunjukkan bahawa wanita yang memiliki tahap pendidikan yang tinggi iaitu peringkat menengah atas dan graduan, mempunyai kuasa membuat keputusan yang lebih berbanding mereka yang 'buta huruf' iaitu mereka yang hanya memiliki pendidikan peringkat rendah dan menengah. Didapati juga bahawa, wanita yang bekerja sepenuh masa mempunyai lebih kuasa membuat keputusan dari suri rumah dan wanita yang bekerja sendiri. Lebih tepat, tahap pendidikan seseorang wanita, merupakan variabel penting dalam mempertingkatkan peluang bekerja disamping meningkatkan pendapatan mereka.

Objektif keempat kajian adalah untuk menentukan faktor-faktor (terutamanya variabel bebas) yang mungkin akan mempengaruhi kuasa membuat keputusan wanita (tahap pendayaupayaan) pada peringkat keluarga. Analisa "multiple linear regression" dilakukan untuk menentukan faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi tahap kuasa membuat keputusan. Hasil kajian menunjukkan pendidikan, pekerjaan, pendapatan dan kesedaran ketidaksetaraan berdasarkan gender adalah tinggi iaitu pada $p < 0.001$. Manakala pendapatan, hanya signifikan pada $p < 0.05$. Analisa varians (ANOVA) menunjukkan signifikan keseluruhan model regresi linear dengan F-test ($P < 0.001$) untuk perubahan ketara model dengan 'regression coefficient' (R square) pada 0.51. Pada keseluruhannya, kajian mencadangkan peningkatan peluang pendidikan terutamanya peringkat lebih tinggi akan meningkatkan peluang pekerjaan dan pendapatan wanita. Ini akan mengembangkan kebolehan mereka dalam membuat keputusan di peringkat keluarga dan memainkan peranan penting dalam pendayaupayaan wanita luar bandar.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

(At the outset, I bow to the grace and mercy of the Almighty Allah (swt) without whose desire I could not have materialized my dream to complete this thesis)

I would like to extend my heartiest gratitude and appreciation to Professor Dr. Jayum Anak Jawan, chairman of the supervisor committee for providing invaluable advice, untiring assistance, encouragement, motivation and his social support that enabled me to accomplish the PhD program smoothly and efficiently. I am deeply indebted to Dr. Sharifah Norazizan Syed Abdul Rashid and Dr Mohammad Shatar Sabran, members of supervisory committee for their constructive suggestions, proper guidance and encouragement through my study period. I am also grateful to Dr Adrian E. Hare, Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) for editing sincerely throughout the thesis.

My heartfelt appreciation goes to my mother, who always encouraged and supported me during the thesis writing period. Staying with me, she was always praying and fasting for me to see me through. Special thanks go to my father who is always supported me to reach such a level beside my brothers. Special thanks and appreciation also go to my brother-in-law Mr. Jakir Hossen who helped me lots especially collecting signature and thesis from supervisory committee. I would also like to special thanks to my friends Dr Rawsan Ara Begum, Dr Rafia Afrose and Mr Tanvir Mahmud for their suggestions and cooperation during my study period. Their contributions and suggestions helped me to overcome many errors and showed me the right path for this work. Special thanks also go to my Malaysian

friends to Mr Sabri, Mr Arnold and Miss Hirfarizan for their kind cooperation to finish the study smoothly.

The data collection for this thesis was made possible with the help of several people in Dinajpur District, Bangladesh. I am grateful to Mr. Salam, the Executive Director of Bangladesh Social Development Association (BSDA) for his kind cooperation. Many thanks go to the Branch Manager of Karitatus and the field workers for their invaluable assistance.

Last but not the least, I am very grateful to my husband Dr. Md. Zahangir Alam, Assistant Professor, Department of Biotechnology Engineering, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) for his constant encouragement, patience, understanding, and a lot of helping as editing and teaching me data analysis etc, that stepped up me to finish the study smoothly and timely. A special thank also goes to him for providing the financial support for me to pursue the doctoral program, and a lot of sacrificing and loneliness to fulfill his dream. Without his contribution, getting a doctoral degree would remain a dream for me. At the beginning of my PhD work, I was blessed with my son Shahamzeer Sreezan Alam who inspired and enabled me to accomplish the PhD program smoothly.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
DEDICATION	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
ABSTRAK	vi
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ix
APPROVAL	xii
DECLARATION	xiii
LIST OF TABLES	xviii
LIST OF FIGURES	xx
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xxii
 CHAPTER	
 1 INTRODUCTION	 1
1.1 Background to the Research	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem	10
1.3 Objectives of the Study	19
1.4 Significance of the Study	20
1.5 Limitation of the Study	23
1.6 Definition of Terms	23
1.7 Organization of the Thesis	27
 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	 31
2.1 The Definitions, Concept and Approaches of Power and Empowerment	31
2.1.1 Summary	48
2.2 The Relationship between Women's Empowerment and Socio-Cultural Norms	50
2.2.1 Measurement the Level of Empowerment from a Socio-Cultural Perspective	53
2.2.2 Summary	56
2.3 Role of Women's Education in Increasing the Level of their Empowerment	58
2.3.1 Summary	65
2.4 Patriarchy and Gender-Based Inequality in relation to Women's Education and Empowerment	66
2.4.1. Concept of Patriarchy in Relation to Women's Education and Empowerment	66
2.4.2 Concept of Patriarchy and Gender-Based equality and Inequality in relation to Women's Education and Empowerment	70
2.4.3 Summary	73
2.5 <i>Purdah</i> -related norms and Its Affects on Women's Education as well as their Empowerment	74
2.5.1 Concept, Practice and Background of <i>Purdah</i>	74
2.5.2 Influence of <i>Purdah</i> on Women's Education as well as	79



	their Empowerment	
	2.5.3 Summary	85
	2.6 Socio-Cultural Factors Influencing Gender Gap in Education	85
	2.6.1 Summary	94
	2.7 A Brief Portrait of Women's Education in Bangladesh as well as Other Countries.	95
	2.7.1 Women's Education in Bangladesh	98
	2.8 Conclusion	101
	2.9 Theoretical Framework of the Study	104
3	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	108
	3.1 Framework of the Study	108
	3.2 Description of the Study Area	112
	3.3 Selection of the Study Areas	114
	3.4 Selection of the Respondents	119
	3.5 Description of Data Collection Procedures	120
	3.6 Measurement of the Variables	123
	3.6.1 Independent Variables	124
	Socio-economic Background of the Respondents	124
	Gender Based Factors (Respondent's Gender Ideology about Education)	126
	<i>Purdah</i> -Related Factors	128
	3.6.2 Dependent Variable: Decision-Making Power (the Level of Empowerment)	130
	3.7 Reliability Test of the Scale	132
	3.8 Data Collection Methods	133
	3.9 Quantitative Data Collection	134
	3.10 Qualitative Data Collection	135
	3.10.1 Defining why the Qualitative Method Was Used	135
	3.10.2 Qualitative Data Collection procedures	137
	In-depth Interview	139
	Focus Group Discussions	139
	Participation Observation	142
	3.11 Data Analysis	144
	3.11.1 Quantitative Data Analysis	144
	3.11.2 Qualitative Data Analysis	151
4	BACKGROUND OF STUDY AREA AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENT	153
	4.1 Back ground of the Study Context	153
	4.2 Social Status of Rural Women	155
	4.3 Economic Activities of Rural Women	156
	4.4 Profile of the Respondents	158
	4.4.1 Respondent's age	159
	4.4.2 Religious Status	160
	4.4.3 Educational Status	161
	4.4.4 Occupational Status	162
	4.4.5 Respondent's Income	163

4.4.6 Total Number of Children	164
4.4.7 Senior Family Members	166
4.4.8 Children's Educational Status	167
4.5 Conclusion	170
5 INFLUENCE OF GENDER-BASED AWARENESS IN WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT	172
5.1 Introduction	172
5.2 Respondent's General Knowledge of Gender	173
5.3 Respondent's Perceptions on educating their Children	179
5.4 Measuring Respondent's Gender Ideology through Likert Format	188
5.5 Respondent's Parents Ideology and their Personal Attitudes towards their children's Education: Qualitative Findings	195
5.6 Conclusion	201
6 AFFECT OF <i>PURDAH</i> RELATED-NORMS ON WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT	203
6.1 Introduction	203
6.2 Respondent's General Understanding Regarding <i>Purdah</i>	204
6.3 Measuring Respondent's Ideology Regarding <i>Purdah</i> through Likert Format	209
6.4 Awareness of <i>Purdah</i> -Related Norms	215
6.5 Relationship between <i>Purdah</i> Awareness and Socio-economic Variables	216
6.6 Respondent's Ideology about the Practice of <i>Purdah</i> : Qualitative findings	218
6.7 Conclusion	229
7 WOMEN'S DECISION-MAKING POWER (MEASUREMENT THE LEVEL OF EMPOWERMENT)	230
7.1 Introduction	230
7.2 Respondent's Decision-Making Power through Education	231
7.3 Respondent's Decision-Making Power through Occupation	245
7.4 Classifications of the Decision-Making Items	250
7.5 Index of Decision-Making Power	252
7.6 Relationship between Decision Making Power and Education, Occupation and Income	254
7.7 Measurements of the Respondent's Decision-Making Power: The Qualitative Findings	256
7.8 Conclusion	263
8 DETERMINE THE FACTORS THAT MIGHT AFFECT ON DECISION MAKING POWER (LEVEL OF EMPOWERMENT)	265
8.1 Introduction	265
8.2 Multiple Regression Model	266
8.3 Conclusion	271

9	SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, IMPLICATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	272
	9.1 Introduction	272
	9.2 Summary	272
	9.3 Conclusions	285
	9.4 Implications and Recommendations	288
	9.5 Recommendations for Further Research	294
	REFERENCES	297
	APPENDIX	322
	BIODATA OF THE AUTHOR	336



LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1.1	Ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education by year	7
2.1	Definitions of power and empowerment in practice	47
2.2	Women in Decision-making Positions of selected countries (% at ministerial level)	56
2.3	Illiteracy rate (% of male 15+ and female15+) by sex & selected country.	96
2.4	Adult literacy rate (literacy rate of 15-24 year olds) by sex and year	99
3.1	Total respondents from the selected areas in rural Bangladesh	118
3.2	Scale of variable measurement and level of measurement for statistical analysis	130
3.3	Reliability coefficient of variables	132
3.4	Selection of the respondents for qualitative methods	137
3.5	Sample calculations in order to determining the decision-making percentage with different level of education	147
3.6	Sample calculations in order to determining the decision-making percentage with occupational level	148
4.1	Children's educational status	169
5.1	Awareness of gender-based factors regarding education	191
6.1	Awareness of <i>Purdah</i> -related factors	212
6.2	Respondent's overall assessment on the <i>Purdah</i> awareness	215
6.3	Correlation coefficient between <i>Purdah</i> awareness and socio-economic variables	217
7.1	Respondent's decision-making power through education	234
7.2	Respondent's decision-making power through occupation	247



7.3	Respondent's overall assessment on the decision-making power	253
7.4	Correlation coefficient between decision making power and, education, occupation and income	255
8.1	The coefficients, t-test, p-values from regression analysis for decision-making power (level of empowerment)	269
8.2	ANOVA for multiple regression analysis	270

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
2.1	Theoretical framework of the study	107
3.1	Framework of the study	112
3.2	Map of Bangladesh	113
3.3	Map of Dinajpur District	116
3.4	Map of Sadar Thana	117
3.5	Framework of multiple linear regression model	151
4.1	Respondent's age	159
4.2	Religious status	160
4.3	Respondent's educational status	161
4.4	Occupational status	163
4.5	Respondent's income	164
4.6	Total number of children	165
4.7	Senior family members	166
5.1	Understanding of gender	174
5.2	Understanding of inequality	175
5.3	Remarking inequality by respondent's parents	175
5.4	Remarking inequality from respondent's parents in different aspects	176
5.5	Higher expectation on brother carrier	177
5.6	Lower expectation on respondent's carrier	178
5.7	Regarding opportunity to respondent's children in education	179
5.8	Reasons to give higher priority on son's education	181
5.9	Higher priority on daughter in education	181



5.10	Less priority on daughter's education	183
5.11	Choose only one child in providing education	185
5.12	Reasons to stop daughter's education when she grows up	186
5.13	The possible reasons to stop daughter's education when she grows up.	187
6.1	Understanding about the <i>Purdah</i>	205
6.2	Choice to wear the <i>Purdah</i>	208

LIST OF ABBREVIATION

BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
UNDP	United Nation Development Program
GB	Grameen Bank
WHO	World Health Organization
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
DAWN	Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era
ILO	International Labour Organization
DFID	Department for International Development
BANBEIS	Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics
DMPI	Decision-Making Power Index as the Level of Empowerment.
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Research

Although a half of the world's populations are women, it has been noted that most of the development programs are focused on men rather than on women. The latter are often described as illiterate, unskilled and poor and segregated in any occupation that pays wages. Women constitute about 70 percent of the World's poor (Saadallah, 2001). According to Snyder (1980), the only development assistance which usually reaches women directly is of the welfare type-mother and childcare which is not enough. Sipila (1979), Assistant Secretary General for Social Development and Human Affairs of the United Nations stated in her report that where there is poverty there are women who suffer from its worst effects. Although women make tremendous contributions to the economy, women's contributions are not valued in the same way as men. As a result women consistently find themselves at a lower economic status than men.

According to the Human Development Report (1999), various UN/World Bank reports and the report of the Mahbub-ul-Haq Human Development Centre, Islamabad, the South Asian region is fast emerging as one of the most deprived regions in the world. It is the poorest region in the world with a GNP per capita of US \$ 452 in 1997. South Asia has the largest number of people living in poverty,