Gendered Spaces and Economic and Social Stagnation

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The incorporation of "gender" into development thinking and policy leads seamlessly into raising the salience of women's well-being, women's issues and women's perspectives. This is hardly surprising given that female disadvantage in most areas is so glaring. There is still much to be gained, nevertheless, in focusing on "gender relations" as providing insights into the functioning of entire economies and social systems. This paper argues that the high degree of gender segregation -- or a highly gendered demarcation of space -- is associated not only with female disadvantage. Factors that sustain gender segregation are also associated with the persistence of economic and social stagnation.

Female Disadvantage and Patriarchy

No lengthy thesis is required to make the case that female disadvantage is a persistent feature of most aspects of life in most places. Pakistan in particular lies within a geo-cultural zone stretching from North Africa, through West Asia, up to northern India, which is known for some of the most severe forms of patriarchy in the world. Survival itself is highly gendered in these societies.[1]

While the average number of females to every one hundred males was 106 in the rest of the world, in the South Asian region this ratio was 94.1, and Pakistan, with 93.7 females per 100 males had the lowest female-male ratio in the region. If the female-male ratio in Pakistan were similar to the "rest of the world" there would have been nearly 9 million females in the country than there actually were. In other words there were some 9 million "missing women".[2] The proximate causes for the low female-male ratios are not hard to ascertain. There are significant sex-wise differences in rates of mortality, morbidity, malnutrition, and in access to health care. Similarly, there are strong sex-wise differences in literacy rates, school enrolment ratios, and other indicators of education. If development is to do with improving life chances and improving lives, then it is quite largely to do with the conditions of the lives of women and girls.

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[1] See Naila Kabeer (1997), Reversed Realities: Gender Hierarchies in Development Thought (London: Verso), for a very useful review of literature on geo-cultural zones.

[2] Such calculations were made popular by Amartya Sen in the 1980s. The data used here are derived from Human Development in South Asia 2000: The Gender Question, produced by the Mahbub ul Haq Human Development Centre, Islamabad. This latter report provides an excellent summary of some of the key issues in gender, and a review of statistical data on female disadvantage.

If patriarchy is defined as female disadvantage and male domination, then sex-wise disparities in statistical indices such as mortality and literacy highlight only some of the many aspects of the problem. Female disadvantage in law, rights, custom, social norms and conventions, and the exclusion or invisibility of women from key arenas of decision-making are persistent features of the institutional environment of countries like Pakistan.[3] Pakistan is perhaps a country where women's access to public spaces, their mobility, their visibility, and their participation in public life are the most restricted. Socially sanctioned gender-wise segregation of space becomes immediately apparent in statistics such as those relating to female participation in education, in the formal labour force, and in electoral politics.

Public and Private Spaces

It can be argued in that in societies such as Pakistan traditional norms concerning the division of space between public and private domains are gendered by definition. Norms of *zanana* or *chadar-chardiwari* are ready references for the classification of the world into the male public space and the female and familial private space. In other words, the very notion of public and private domains is gendered. The *chardiwari* marks out the territory inhabited by women and men within a familial setting and the world beyond the *chardiwari* is inhabited mostly by men interacting across familial settings. Women can venture out into the non-familial world beyond the *chardiwari* on condition of invisibility (*chadar*), and normally in the company of or with the permission of familial males.[4]

The actual norms of gender segregation are, of course, at variance from the simple *chadar-chardiwari* model. The precise delineation of the *chardiwari* varies over time and place. In any case, the *chardiwari* is rarely the exclusive domain of a nuclear family. In the Sindhi *goth* (village), for example, the entire enclosed area of the village, which is normally marked out by thorny bushes, is a *chardiwari* of sorts. Women enjoy unrestricted mobility within the *goth* but face restrictions in venturing beyond the *goth*. Restrictions also apply to the entry of non-familial males into the *goth*, and they normally have to conduct any business with local men in a designated male "public" setting known as the *autaq*.

Even the idealized norm of the *goth-autaq* division of space is not completely determined, but is subject to individual differences. In other areas of the country the terminology and the precise division of space vary, but the gendered division of public and private spaces, does nevertheless, remain strong. In some rural areas (such as parts of *barani* Punjab), the

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[3] See, for instance, the Report of the Commission of Inquiry for Women of the Government of Pakistan (August 1997), among others.

[4] See Kabeer (1994) for discussions of patriarchy in this light. There are few systematic studies of these issues in Pakistan, though the field holds much promise for empirical work. See, for example, Ayesha Khan's thoughful probing using quantitative data (Khan, 1999, 'Mobility of Women and Access to Health and Family Planning Services in Pakistan, Reproductive Health Matters, vol 7 no. 14) and a larger quantitative survey on aspects of autonomy and mobility by Zeba Sathar and Shahnaz Kazi (1997), "Autonomy, Livelihood and Fertility: A Study of Rural Punjab", Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, Islamabad.

gendered division is less severe, while in others (such as parts of NWFP) it is stricter.[5] In urban settings the *mohalla* might take on some features of the *chardiwari*, and local norms of "decent dress" some features of the *chadar*. The main points worth stressing are the following: first, social divisions of space are, in general, highly gendered in Pakistan, and second, the division of space is not determined in strictly dual "public" and "private" spheres, but there are gradations between these two polar positions. The gradations correspond with different levels of social – in effect familial – proximity or distance.

At one level the relevance of the gendered demarcation of public and private spaces is patently obvious. If the public space is identified closely with non-familial male interaction, and the private space is identified closely with familial inhabitation, there are clear problems in the fulfilment of modern ideals of equality in the sphere of rights, access to health facilities and schools, participation in politics, and employment in remunerative work and other forms of market access. Women's ability to do all of these things is mediated by the men who control the terms of their entry into the "public" sphere, where all of these activities are generally located. But there are also other, subtler, and perhaps more insidious issues at stake. How do these traditional norms concerning gendered spaces interact with social change and economic growth? Are there factors that provide stability to the gendered division of space in the face of externally induced impulses for change? And if so, what are the implications of current policy paradigms for gender relations as well as for social change and economic growth?

The Production of Public Goods

Many of the questions raised here are of a speculative nature, and much theoretical and empirical work is required before the propositions and linkages suggested here can be treated as viable explanations of the present or interesting indicators of future action. It is important, nevertheless, to begin sketching at least the outlines of an argument, and supplement this outline with some empirical reference.

The first thing to note is that the notion of "public space" which is so useful as a way of

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[5] These observations are based on author's fieldwork in rural Pakistan, reported variously in Haris Gazdar (2000), "State, Community, and Public Schooling - A Political Economy of Universal Education in Pakistan", mimeograph, Asia Research Centre, London School of Economics; Haris Gazdar, Ayesha Khan and Themrise Khan (2002), "Land Tenure, Rural Livelihoods, and Institutional Innovations", mimeo, Collective for Social Science Research, Karachi, and Haris Gazdar (2002), "A Qualitative Survey of Poverty in Rural Pakistan: Methodology, Data, and Main Findings - A background study for World Bank Pakistan Poverty Assessment 2002", mimeo, World Bank and Collective for Social Science Research. Fieldwork for these studies was carried out in rural areas of the following districts: Attock, Chakwal, Faisalabad, Hafizabad, Khairpur, Larkana, Mardan, Muzaffargarh, Nawabshah, Sanghar, Swabi, and Toba Tek Singh. Although "gender" was not in itself the primary research question in any of the three studies cited here, empirical definitions of "community" were virtually impossible without reference to the gendered division of space. As such these studies extensively on gender analysis, and were able to generate data on gender relations.

understanding the dynamics of gender relations, also has a powerful alternative interpretation in modern economic theory. Public space, or the more general concept of a "public good" relates to something that is, by definition, non-excludable. A good or service is "non-excludable" if it is technically impossible or highly costly to exclude a person from enjoying its use. The reduction of vehicle emissions through the introduction of cleaner fuels leads to cleaner air for all residents of the city. Once an improvement in air quality has been achieved it would be impossible or highly costly to prevent an individual benefiting from it.

While some public goods such as clean air are non-excludable due to technical reasons other public goods are non-excludable by design. A public school is deliberately created in order to make free or subsidized schooling available to ALL children within its catchment area. A school can no longer be called a "public" school if some children within its catchment area face restrictions to it on the basis of caste, class, or family. [6] There are important reasons for valuing public goods of different types, and many of these reasons lie firmly within the framework of economic well-being and efficiency. "Public space" is in large part like a public school – i.e. a public good by design rather than by default. An *autaq* in a Sindh *goth*, or a *chopal* in a village in Punjab is a public space by design. Its very success depends on people having unhindered access to it. But at the same time these very spaces practice active exclusion on the basis of gender, and in some cases social status.

The second point to note is that the production of public goods is one of the most important problems of economic policy. The basic story is that public goods are non-excludable, and therefore it is very costly (or impossible) to charge a price for their use. This means that competitive markets will tend to produce far fewer public goods than are socially optimal, and hence there is scope for state action. The problem has been explained by Olson who argued that voluntary "collective action" for the production of public goods was hard to conceive due to free-riding on the part of individuals.[7] Take the example of a village facing the threat of a flood. The construction of a dam might save the village and all its inhabitants, and therefore it will be in all their individual interests to contribute to the dam. But an individual might well consider that he will benefit from the dam even if he did not take part in its building. If many people think like that the dam will never be built, even though the cost of building it would have been lower than the cost of facing the flood.[8] Olson suggested that the "illogic" of voluntary collective action provided a sound ethical basis for involuntary collective action – for example the levying of taxes by government – for the production of socially desirable public goods.

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[6] Public schools are supposed to enroll all children of the relevant age group who are resident in the pre-defined catchment area of the school. There are plenty of examples in Pakistan of an otherwise well-functioning government school excluding some groups resident in the catchment area on grounds of caste, kinship, or factional rivalry. These schools operate as "public" schools for one segment of the catchment area, while excluding another segment. See Gazdar (2000) for field-based insights on public schooling.

[7] Mancur Olson (1965), The Logic of Collective Action - Public Goods and the Theory of Groups (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press).

[8] This example is based on an actual case study in rural south Punjab, reported in Gazdar (2002).

Applying the economic approach to public goods to gendered spaces, it can be seen that the division of the world between "public" and "private" spaces can be recast as a division between "public spaces" of different types. A Sindhi *goth* for example is a "public space" as far as the male and female residents of the village itself are concerned. It excludes non-village males. The *autaq*, on the other hand, is a "public space" for male villagers and non-villagers alike, to the exclusion of female villagers and non-villagers. The *chardiwari* encloses a "public space" for the male and female members of an extended family that happen to live in one compound. Even within this *chardiwari* there will be smaller living quarters to which only individual nuclear families might have access.

We proceed, therefore, from a dichotomous division of the world (between public and private spaces) to a multiplicity of public spaces which are identified by the type of people that have access to it. A key axis in the definition of a "public space" appears to be familial proximity. The stronger the familial bond within the group in question, the greater will be the access of women of the group to that space, and vice versa. It is a persistent finding of empirical research in rural Pakistan, for example, that public schools in single-kinship group villages tend to operate more effectively as mixed gender schools. Such schools might well practice exclusion vis-a-vis other castes or kinship groups living in the neighbourhood, but do not practice exclusion vis-a-vis girls of the same caste or kinship group.[9]

Patriarchy as a Mode of Collective Action

What appears as the gender division of space in Pakistan, therefore, is at least partly related to the production of "public spaces" of different types by groups with different levels of familial or kinship proximity. Spaces where familial bonds are the weakest are those where women face a high degree of exclusion. On the other hand, spaces where familial bonds are most salient are also those which restrict access to non-familial males (but not to non-familial females). In this sense patriarchy in Pakistani society takes a specific form that is quite close to the original literal meaning of the term - namely "the rule of the father over his family". The basic building block in many of the diverse social formations – such as factions, political alignments, vote blocks, tribes, and even entire villages – is the family ruled over by its male head. Inter-related families come together in these wider networks, and operate on a similarly patriarchal basis – there are powerful men from powerful families who lead these wider networks.

The production of a public good -- namely a particular public space -- is one of the consequences of these patriarchal familial networks. These networks also facilitate collective action for the production of other public goods including schools, health facilities, risk insurance, voting blocks, and even mechanisms for dispute resolution and contract enforcement.[10] All of these are public goods the production of which faces the classic free-rider problem enunciated by Olson. Yet we do observe the active production of all of these public goods at the local level by networks based on "the rule of the father over his family"

[9] Gazdar (2000).

[10] Gazdar (2002).

and its extensions over related families. Whereas in Olson's model the constraints to voluntary collective action led, perforce, to the ethical justification of involuntary state-organized collective action, in societies such as those of Pakistan, it is the patriarchal familial networks that effectively overcome constraints to collective action. It is hardly surprising that the term for a village or tribal leader among some communities -- *raees* -- shares its etymological root with the formal term for state (*riyasat*) in the local languages. The patriarch, therefore, is the psuedo-state, and he performs many of the functions that are normally associated with functioning modern states.

Some Implications of "The Rule of the Father"

While the term patriarchy literally means "the rule of the father", its contemporary usage encompasses a much wider range of structures of male domination. Pakistan is not unique, however, in societies where organic familial networks that are literally ruled by fathers persist and play a role in the production of various public goods. What are the implications of this observation for economic development and social change?

Firstly, a clarification: the fact that patriarchy or the "rule of the father" acts as a mode of collective action is not necessarily grounds for celebration -- in fact quite the reverse. Patriarchal networks do produce (mostly local) public goods, including different types of public spaces, but these public goods differ from modern notions of public goods in at least one crucial way. The domain of public goods --or the composition of the group for which the public good is produced -- is usually based on universal access with qualifications relating to location, place or residence, or age. A modern public school, for example, is supposed to be open to all children of certain ages, and living in a particular locality. The public goods produced through patriarchal collective action, however, typically exclude those groups that are not organically part of the extended familial network. While the main formal criterion for recognizing group membership in modern public goods is citizenship, the "rule of the fathers" follows its own hierarchy of affiliation. A person is part of a patriarchal family, which is part of a group of related families, which form part of a wider kinship network such as *biradri* or tribe, which might be part of a yet wider solidarity group identified by ethnicity, and so on. Her or his access to public goods thus produced, and her or his ability to influence decisions about the production of such public goods is mediated through multiple layers of a patriarchal hierarchy. It is useful, therefore, to think of the public goods produced through the "rule of the fathers" as being parochially-segmented public goods.

Secondly, the idea that patriarchal networks actually do act as nodes of collective action indicates that, within limits, these networks and the hierarchy they embed perform useful functions for their members. In other words, there are persistent functional reasons for large numbers of people to maintain and uphold "the rule of the father" as the means of producing some crucial public goods such as local facilities, risk insurance, political voice, dispute resolution and contract enforcement, and even physical protection from other groups. The state-like functioning of the patriarch provides some stability and legitimacy to this system, and allows it to be reproduced in the face of modern political and social institutions, and even within modern political and social institutions.

Thirdly, there are quite often natural limits to social and economic value of parochially-segmented public goods. These public goods strengthen parochial identities, quite often at

the expense of wider, more inclusive, and even universalist identities. While the patriarch acting as *raees*, for example, might provide effective means for dispute resolution and contract enforcement within his domain, it is highly likely that this system will lead to less efficient contract enforcement across the economy as a whole. A system based, ultimately, on familial affiliation is likely to face severe diseconomies of scale, despite the fact that norms of family formation enhance the demographic reach of familial networks.[11] While "the rule of the fathers" might enjoy local advantages as a mode of collective action, its wider implications are likely to include high degrees of social, political, and market segmentation, and therefore weaken the basis for the production of wider economy-wide public goods.

The Modern State versus "The Rule of the Father"

The striking picture of female disadvantage and gendered spaces in societies like Pakistan, therefore, is closely associated with the stability of familial patriarchal networks as domains of collective action. The "rule of the father" reproduces itself in many different ways ranging from ideological investment to cousin marriages. A key factor that provides a degree of stability and legitimacy to the "rule of the father" is the absence or weakness of other viable mechanisms for the production of public goods. The strength of the "rule of the father", therefore, can be seen as being associated with the weakness of the modern state. It will be unwise to speculate any further about the direction of causality, and in any case, the determination of causality serves little useful purpose. It is possible, however, on the basis of the above discussion -- some of which is itself admittedly speculative and demands more careful theoretical and empirical attention -- to stick one's neck out on two important points.

Firstly, factors that maintain women in a position of perpetual disadvantage and oppression are closely linked to factors that inhibit the achievement of other social goals such as dispute resolution and economic growth. Countries like Pakistan are in what might be called a "bad equilibrium" of female disadvantage, social backwardness and economic stagnation. While the country might witness periods of economic growth, there are structural factors – many of them to do with the "rule of the father" which inhibit the achievement of market deepening and economies of scale. Under these conditions any growth episodes that do occur are unable to shift the economy to a higher long-term growth path. It is not being argued, of course, that the promotion of economic growth ought to be the reason for confronting patriarchy – concerns such as women's physical and social survival provide sufficient reasons if reasons for required. But it is useful, nevertheless, to note the potential synergy between two apparently disparate social goals: confronting patriarchy and promoting economic growth.

Secondly, policies that tend to weaken the already weak modern institutions of state are likely

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[11] A rare national survey of its type showed that a staggering two-thirds of married women in Pakistan had been married to their cousins (Demographic and Health Survey 1991, Macro International, Honolulu, and National Institute of Population Studies, Islamabad). Complementary data on Indian states (National Family Health Survey 1991, International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai, India) contrast with Indian states was striking. In the northern Indian states neighbouring Pakistan the incidence of cousin marriages was statistically insignificant.

to strengthen "the rule of the father". This applies to the programmes of neo-liberal orthodoxy that regard the state as an impediment to economic performance as well as to individual liberty, and want to create a world of unfettered market participants. The neo-liberal arose in advanced capitalist countries where the state was, indeed, powerful. In countries like Pakistan where modern institutions are already fragile, the dismantling of the state will result in further anarchy, more segmented markets, and an even more robust "rule of the father". Organizations like the World Bank and the IMF which have considerable political as well as ideological influence on Pakistani policy-makers push the neo-liberal agenda on (arguably spurious) grounds of economic efficiency, without taking into account the wider implications for societal development.

While neo-liberal economists wield a great deal of power they are not the only unwitting promoters of the "rule of the father" in countries like Pakistan. Many of the "post-modern" critics of the state see nothing but manifestations of male violence in the project of modern statecraft, and tend to overlook the positive opportunities held out by modern citizenship. Other would-be reformers who revel in the opportunities presented by decentralization also overlook the possibility that the gaps left open by retreating formal institutions are bound to be filled by the already resilient caste, kinship, and family networks that thrive upon and reproduce the "rule of the father".