The Hidden Key

Attitudes toward the Education of Women and Girls in Northern Pakistan

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1. Introduction

There is a general agreement that literate women in both North and South should be able to:

- read the labels on cans and boxes of food
- read a bus or a train schedule
- look up numbers in a telephone directory
- read a contract, a health insurance form, a deed, or a waiver
- read a map
- read medical directions
- help their children with homework
- read the menu in a restaurant
- read road signs
- get a job requiring reading or writing
- read the warning labels on poisons and pesticides
- read a letter from a relative or friend and write a response
- keep their own accounts

(Ballara 1992 s.59)

1.1 Aims

I was sitting on the veranda of the house of the village elder in the village of Biori, in a narrow and out-of-the-way side-valley to the Chitral Valley in northern Pakistan. I was peeling onions and trying to keep my chador (large veil enfolding the entire body) from my eyes while thinking about what I had just heard. There was a school for girls in the village, but it was empty! There was no teacher, no woman with a high enough education and who knew the language of the village that could teach the girls. If there had been one, all the girls of the village would probably have been in school. They all wanted to, I had been told. This knowledge I have carried with me ever since then: I have been touched by it, angered by it, and also thought about practical solutions.

As I was thinking about a subject for the C level paper, I remembered that day in the village of Biori and decided to write about the education of women and girls in northern Pakistan, in order to better understand the situation myself. But where does one begin when wanting to understand something from its core? What is the most basic when dealing with a problem? Attitudes!
I had been led to believe that most of those I had talked to about education wanted at least girls and unmarried women to be able to go to school, and education was something everyone wanted their children to have. There were even those who thought that the adult women as well should be given the opportunity to study.

Thus, through writing this paper, I wanted to get a better understanding of the educational situation of women and girls in the area where I work. Perhaps I might, at the same time, give something that is new and worth considering to my readers. Throughout the work, I have discovered how things in society are connected, and that there are not just one or two factors that make it hard to improve the opportunities for education for all, but that the whole structure of society either works against or facilitates people reaching their dreams. I have also come to understand that there are always, in all contexts, people who think differently from the people around them, and also strive to reach their goals in spite of the negative attitudes of others. Therefore, I put forth the question:

**What attitudes towards the education of women and girls exist in northern Pakistan, and why?**

Creativity is said to be something that creates new things, something beyond the ordinary. Anthropology, at its best, is in my view, a creative science. Anthropologists seek to think in different patterns from the usual ones, and find new, uncommon, and even critical perspectives on the human phenomena that, in themselves may be rather commonplace, depending of course, on whose viewpoint they are seen from. Anthropological studies also aim to increase the mutual understanding between people from different backgrounds.

A paper on C-level in social anthropology like this one cannot be highly creative work, but it can be an exercise in viewing things with other eyes: in trying to see beyond one’s own cultural background, in finding new perspectives on thoughts and problems one finds interesting, in practising anthropological thinking, and also in thinking about what anthropological thinking is!

That is how I want to view this paper. I am treating a subject that, in itself, is something I have already worked with for a longer period, but from a different perspective—as a Westerner in Pakistan wanting to increase the opportunities of education for the local population. In this paper, I want to try to be a
little bit creative- somewhat critical to my own material and spice it up with something of an exploration.

I have split the content part of the paper into three main sections. Chapter two gives a background about northern Pakistan and sets the scene for the information presented to the reader in the two latter sections. Chapter three presents the educational situation of Pakistani women, and shows the realities within which education actually takes place. Finally, in chapter four, I account for the actual attitudes that exist towards the education of women and girls in the northern Pakistan of today. This third main section, i.e. chapter four, is mainly based on e-mail replies that I have received, and on the results of my interviews. I use material from these in other parts of the paper as well and these cases reference is made only to the names of the informants without reference to a year. Brief information about each informant can be found in the references section.

1.2 Theory

I am very much aware that my role as someone working with language- and education projects in Pakistan affects how I view the subject. I believe in the possibilities of education and that every person should, by right, have access to enough education to practice critical thinking towards the outside world, especially in times of globalization, as well as important information that affects his or her own life. I also believe that education could reach everyone more effectively if creative solutions that fit into the local social structures could be found. The good quality education also increases the understanding between people as well as chances and shapes attitudes. I hope that the work with this paper can increase my own understanding of the Pakistani society and thinking.

Being critical is, first and foremost, about defining and thinking about the central concepts that are being used. The concept of education has been criticized before by anthropologists and is often under discussion in aid contexts as well.

Education is a way to pass knowledge on from the older generations to the younger, and to socialize the younger generations to fit into the surrounding society, so that a certain way of acting or living becomes something taken for granted, doxa, for them. This transfer of knowledge is carried out practically in different ways. It can consist of formal school education or a more informal teaching of
knowledge needed in daily life, or in retelling folk stories that pass on inherited knowledge. In this paper three kinds of education are discussed: first formal education, in a classroom situation and with a teacher; secondly combined teaching, which could be in the form of workshops with mentors, combining and alternating theoretical knowledge with practical; thirdly informal education, where an older generation transfers its knowledge and skills to the children through stories and joint work.

States regulate knowledge transfer through a system of education that makes education a common cultural capital that people can have a part in to a greater or a lesser extent. In this way the state creates hierarchies and categories of people who fit into the division of labour of the society. (Hannerz 1996:73)

Formal education mostly goes hand in hand with politics, and with power. Citizens are educated to fit into the system that is aspired to. Education creates differences when it separates, and also prepares people for the division of labour and the social structure that already exists in the society. No one is formed solely by the formal education, but also through relationships and informal education. People have access to formal education to different extents, and therefore some are more shaped by it than others, and can generally acquire more economic capital, as well as the cultural capital that gives them access to the higher social classes. (Hannerz 1996:71-73)

Formal education can be perceived in two ways. The traditional view has been that education takes place in a classroom situation where the students are passive recipients of knowledge which is only later put to use. Values, ideas and information are being transferred from teachers to students. Education takes place on an individual level and shapes individuals (Carter 1999:51). This idea seems to be ruling in the formal education of Pakistan as it was inherited from the British colonial power before independence 1947.

Lately, a new view of education has been formed, where learning takes place within a social process, meaning that the students, in interaction with the teachers, are active participants in the pedagogy. The education happens in relationships between the students and the facilitators or mentors of the knowledge (Carter 1999:51). Interestingly, this is the way in which informal education in Pakistan
works. In this way, the girls learn, for instance, to take care of the home, handicrafts and other skills they will need when they get married.

Even though formal school education in itself might not always be necessary for women’s quality of life, it is important, since it shapes people’s perceptions and expectations about the world, and their understanding of it, and to a great extent, defines what is normal and what is not. It also maintains or forms the social roles of society. Education can be either raising barriers or removing them. (Shaheed & Mumtaz 1996:61)

Sometimes education can be a question of life and death. Someone told me about a man who had bought insecticide for his field and left the jar in his house. His old mother, who was ill, thought the son had bought medicine for her, and since she could not read the text on the jar she drank the poison and died within a few hours.

The situation of the Pakistani society is complicated in many different ways. As far as opportunities for formal education are concerned, several factors play a role: religion, ethnic background, the area where one lives, the economic resources, and not least, class membership. The upper class has the economic resources and mostly lives in urban areas, which makes education opportunities accessible on short distance. Many members of the upper class belong to the old landowning elite, which is ethnically Punjabi and whose language, Punjabi, is closely related to the national language, Urdu. They have, since colonial times, been able to guarantee a Western-oriented education for their children this has made their interpretation of Islam modernized, something that gives women and girls the opportunity of receiving education (Talbot 1998:363-364). Highly educated women, therefore, come almost exclusively from the upper and middle classes. These women are also the ones who become leaders and initiators of women’s movements. Women of the lower classes have often had trouble identifying with their sisters in these contexts (Rouse 1996:30).

The differences in social factors play a role in all areas of life. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu coined the term *habitus*, which is a fitting way to explain the similarity in ways of life that join people from the same class. *Habitus* is what one eats, how one eats, what ideology one expresses in one’s lifestyle, what fitting behaviour is, and what isn’t. These are the patterns of behaviour etched in the
body and are unconcieous. According to Bourdieu the social classes in the Marxist sense do not really exist, but he prefers to speak about social spaces or fields, a space created by differences. These are individually and collectively shaped through cooperation and conflict. Bourdieau sees the system of education as something that maintains differences between different habitus and that, through a range of selection processes, separates those who have the best of the cultural capital from those who haven’t. He speaks of cultural capital (education, media, and knowledge about world politics and ideologies) and economic capital. In the social field, which he calls the field of power, the greatest influence over society is exercised through these two kinds of capital. The agreement about existence and the meaning of things, what is taken for granted, Bourdieu calls doxa (Bourdieu 1995:11-20, 117, 183).

In Pakistan, the world of the upper class is such a field of power, where most of the influence is kept, through both economic and intellectual capital. This can be seen in clothing too. Men dress in Western style and women in expensive shalwar kameez (Pakistani dress with long shirt and thin, broad trousers) and use only a dopatta, a long small scarf, artfully draped over the shoulders, or according to the latest fashion, hanging over one shoulder and all the way down to the ground. In this way the scarf becomes a symbol of the relative freedom these women have, since it does not need to cover the whole body, the head and the face. Women receive education, and work increases their status as well in these contexts. In the Pashtun areas in the NWFP (the North West Frontier Province) many women are completely covered in a large burqa, with a small net in the cloth in front of the eyes to look out through. Women are not expected to leave home at all, as the house is considered their domain, where they often though reign supreme and all theoretical education except religious education is considered unnecessary for them by the male relatives. These types of habitus for women in different social fields and their doxa are forcefully construed from birth onwards. Common for all social fields in Pakistan is that relations by blood are very important. The well-being of the entire blood-related group is considered in different decisions, leaving the well-being of the individual a second-hand concern. Investments are made in what benefits the whole group, e.g. the formal education of boys, as these stay in the group where they are born, and do not move to another group as the girls do at marriage.

In aid contexts there is much talk of the dark sides of globalization that lead to a world-wide integration of the economic and financial organizations and decrease the ability of the nation states to affect the situation of their country. Education is said to be the most effective way to preserve cultural identities
in different societies and keep part of the cultural diversity against the cultural singularity of globalization. Access to good education is a necessity in order for peoples to maintain their human right of making their own decisions. Education that takes place within relationships teaches people to live together regardless of their views or religion. (Hallak 1999)

As I compare these thoughts to the situation in Pakistan, I note the definite effects of globalization on this society. Computers have come even to the most isolated mountain districts, and some Western fast food places (which belong to the social field of the young and well-to-do) are popular in larger cities such as Lahore and Rawalpindi. Education, which in the case of Pakistan should maintain the cultural diversity and monitor human rights, has to be something that is negotiated locally, in mutual understanding with the local values that both women and men have. These may not necessarily be the same as the universal values talked about in aid circles. Pakistan has currently signed several international agreements about human rights, including the rights of children and women (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Internet), but how these agreements are realized on a grass roots level is a quite different story. Such agreements are always written on the terms of the countries that have the greatest economic resources and which view market economy as the only alternative.

Whose values and world view are to be the basis of education? We struggle with this problem here in Sweden as well. Should free schools be allowed to exist that teach any other theory about the origin of man than the Darwinist one? Is it discrimination against a people group if it is taught from the preaching pulpit that homosexuality is a sin? These questions are current at the moment. Do we have values that are universal, and can we come up with a list of human rights that everyone can agree to? These questions still remain unanswered, and sadly it seems that those who control the finances of the world market and those who have the greatest lobbying groups rightly placed, to a large extent get to decide whose rights are to be given priority and set the terms for others who are in a dependent position or have a different view of how democracy should function.

1.3 Methods
I base my data mainly on three sources. Firstly, this is a literature study, since there is no room for fieldwork within the framework of a C level paper. Secondly, the study is based on my own experiences from northern Pakistan where I have lived and worked with a language project during the
period between 1998 and 2000, and in conjunction with this also made some notes and interviews. Thirdly, it is based on e-mail correspondence and taped interviews with some people who have worked in Pakistan for a number of years, and also with some Pakistanis.

I sent questions by email (Appendix B) to all those friends and acquaintances that I assumed might be able to help me get a better understanding of the subject through their experience. I also had the opportunity to meet and interview two men with long experience of work in Pakistan. I received ten replies from Pakistanis, and ten from foreigners working in the country.

In the email questions, the informants were requested to make an estimate of how many of the girls and women in their respective areas receive formal education, in order to get a picture of how what is perceived correlates to statistics. I constructed two different questionnaires, one for foreigners (i.e. non-Pakistanis) active in Pakistan and one for Pakistanis. The questions deal with access to formal education, its quality, and local attitudes towards education. These questions are found in Appendix B.

The questions were in no way meant to be an exhaustive study, but more of a way of making some of the voices of Northern Pakistan heard in this study, as a complement to what the different authors in literature have described. The e-mail questions were for practical reasons, in English, and require some computer skills. This has made it impossible for me to receive as many local answers as I would have wished. Some of the Pakistanis have answered the questions themselves, and some have received help from foreign friends in replying. The non-Pakistanis who have answered see and interpret the situation from their own perspective, and since they are active in projects concerned with language, education and health care, they are especially observant of the specific problems in these particular areas. The Pakistanis who have replied are themselves educated, and many of them are relatively young, most under thirty years old.
## 2. Background: Northern Pakistan

### 2.1 General facts

Pakistan is a country with great contrasts and enormous richness in diversity. This is true in areas of ethnicity, linguistics, geography, economy and ideology. The country has both extremely dry deserts with intense heat and high mountains with cold and snowy winters. In Pakistan there are 69 different languages (not counting dialects) spoken (Ethnologue, Internet) and the ethnic diversity is as great as the linguistic diversity. When it comes to the majority religion, Islam, you can find followers for almost all of the sects. There are also the Christian and Hindu minorities. The difference between the rich and the poor is huge in this country with a population around 150 million. (Summer Institute for Linguistics 1992)

Northern Pakistan shows this variation well, being one of the most multilingual areas of the world. The wide valleys and high mountains give natural separation between different geographical areas and have created a great ethnic and linguistic diversity. For thousands of years people have moved through this area on different important trading routes between South- and Central Asia. (Summer Institute for Linguistics 1992)

When referring to northern Pakistan in this paper, I include the northern part of Punjab province, the whole NWFP (North West Frontier Province) and the Northern Areas (the part of Jammu and Kashmir that is under Pakistani control). The bigger cities and other areas mentioned are cities of Islamabad (the capital of the nation state), Rawalpindi and Lahore in Punjab, Peshawar (provincial capital of NWFP), and countryside areas of Punjab, Swat, Chitral, Hunza and Gilgit. I will also mention the Gujurs, a nomadic people group which moves over great areas of the whole region. (Appendix A)

Around 25 different languages are spoken in northern Pakistan. Numbers range from millions of speakers of punjabi and pashto to just few thousand speakers in smaller language groups (Summer Institute for Linguistics 1992). All the former education is either in Urdu or in English. Many men in the area can speak several languages, but most of the women are only able to speak their own language and maybe a little of one of the languages used for wider communication in their own area.
This region has several big cities with millions or hundreds of thousands of people, and the countryside is a colourful quilt of thousands upon thousands of villages surrounded by farming fields. In Pakistan modern technology exists side by side with the traditional way of working and living. A caravan of camels can be seen swinging slowly forward on the main road in front of a modern car shop, while horse wagons, donkeys and shepherds with their flocks compete for road space with shining new luxury jeeps. In the middle of a market place in an isolated country area you can spot a sign of ”Computer Centre” or ”Internet Café” side by side with carpenters and shoemakers using age old techniques for their craft.

2.2 Language politics

“On educational grounds we recommend that the use of the mother tongue be extended to as late stage in education as possible. In particular, pupils should begin their schooling through the medium of the mother tongue.” (Farrell 2000:22)

One of the main concerns for politicians during the relatively short history of the Pakistani nation has been to keep and strengthen the unity of the young nation. It has been their interest to keep the risk of the nation falling apart in check with their choice of political means. The young nation state chose the Urdu as national language, which is seen as an Islamic language in contrast to the linguistically same language, Hindi spoken in India. The central government has seen the different ethnic groups’ desires to achieve minority rights with mistrust. The largest and richest of the provinces, Punjab, has been playing the main part in the politics with its rich natural resources and powerful landowning classes. This has not, of course, been popular amongst the other ethnic groups (Talbot 1998:25-27).

Pakistan has, during its relatively short independence, been in an intensive process of finding its own identity as a nation. There have been several conflicts between regional-, national-, and religious based identities. The famous Pashtoon nationalist Wali Khan has expressed this conflict by saying: “I have been a Pashtoon for 4000 years, a Muslim for 1400 years and a Pakistani for 40 years.” The national language and the religion which has been used to unify the country have led to a conflict between identities, and the central government politics have been seen as a strategy to force the nationalism on the grass roots level and at the same time strengthen the power of Punjabis (Talbot 1998:1-4). Many have asked if they should live as a good Pakistanis, as a good Pashtoons or as a good Muslims, when these three social fields are in conflict with each other.
The literature production or reading and writing in the many minority languages is not encouraged, which makes it very difficult for the speakers of these languages to reach higher education levels. Almost all of the formal education is in Urdu or English, languages that are mother tongues for only a very small group in the country. Many times, children do not understand what is taught at the school and learn the lesson by memorizing, and it is seldom possible, especially in the countryside, to find a teacher who can speak the children’s mother tongue. The existing resources are put into the education of the boys, and families themselves usually give their sons educational priority, thus producing very few female teachers who could teach the girls. Teachers are also known to discipline the students with a hard hand when they are not quick enough in their thinking, and this result in a low motivation to go to the school, especially amongst the girls, who are mainly spending their time inside and close by their homes and do not hear any of the other languages. We can clearly see the results of this language politic from the e-mail answers. This politic effects the quality of the education and strengthens the differences between the ruling classes and the other ethnic groups (Sh.Willson, St.Willson, Hallberg D and C).

2.3 Social structures

“Women appear in three different roles in human life and each one of them, she influences society with telling effect. The first stage in her life is that of the daughter, then of a wife, and lastly of a mother.” (Parveen 1986:47)

Pakistan has lately through different processes developed a larger middle class than ever before. The so-called green revolution that made agriculture more fruitful, work immigration to other countries, and the governmental work opportunities have been the main reasons (Rouse 1996:25-26). This class, or rather, social field, has formed its own special signs in habitus and rising amount of economic capital. Its members have also been able to change its cultural capital, so that distinctions have been created towards such social fields they do not want to be associated with anymore (Bourdieu 1986).

This development has widened the regional differences. The women in urban areas have a different possibilities compared to those in the smaller cities or villages in the countryside. The women from the different social fields experience the issue of equality between sexes in very different ways. There are the professional women, the traditional women, and also those who are in a kind of between stage,
where they are dependent on a male relative to take the products of their work out from the house to be sold. These last mentioned may work under the male relatives, in a collective organization which is led by the women themselves, or sometimes inside their home but under the employment someone outside the house. In the relatively new middle class we find those women with high education and work that are privileged exceptions as well as those with less education, who work as nurses or teachers in the government schools and do not have support from a network around them, thus making them economically insecure and targets for sexual abuse at their work place (Rouse 1996:24-27).

According Bourdieu it is not possible to separate the genus differences from the class differences. The ways of realizing womanhood are as many as the classes and the fractions of the classes, or the social fields, as he calls them. For this reason, the division of the work takes different forms in the different social groups. Bourdieu also says that it is often the professions that have historically been dominated by the women that have the low status and low salary (Bourdieu 1986). One of those who answered to the e-mail questionnaire provides a Pakistani example; she says that some of the women from the higher social classes have managed to enter work areas dominated by men, and the men have found this difficult to accept, as they considered it a threat to their own positions (Jalal).

Because of the strong social stigma against the work amongst those not blood related women do not often have any other possibility than to work inside the home and be dependent on their male relatives. The discourse around the working women is divided on respectable and non-respectable professions, respectable and non-respectable reasons to work and respectable and nonrespectable women (Rouse 1996:24-27). In a society where women’s social privileges and status are dependent on her respectability and chastity makes protection of this honour important for both men and women (Barth 1981:108). My own experience from Pakistan has taught me that those who are the most eager protectors of the honour are the women themselves. The issue of honour is an important factor in doxa where you make distinction between the respectable lifestyle and that of non-respectable (Bourdieu 1986).

For the families with very little economic capital, the formal school education is a real burden. The school fees and the obligatory school uniforms are expensive. For this reason it is usually much more
economically advantageous to educate the boys who will stay in the extended family than the girls who will marry and move to their husband’s household with their resources (Radloff, Lekardal).

The educated women are most often from the groups that have both economic and cultural capital. They have the opportunities for high quality education and also willingness and the money for acquiring a profession. Their own parents are probably educated and live in the urban areas. A woman who is educated has contact with media, has wide network of relations even outside her home and has probably a dialog with her husband. This dialog makes it possible for her to have her say on questions of family planning, children’s education, and other important questions that have a direct effect on her life (Sathar 1996:143-147).

A good example of woman with this kind of background is the former prime minister of Pakistan, Mrs. Benazir Bhutto. She was elected to the position of prime minister when she was 35 years and she was the first women to head an Islamic state. She was educated in the United States and England and came originally from the province of Punjab (Visram 1992:55).

The Surah 33:32-33 in the Koran where the wives of the prophet are told not to leave their homes can be interpreted in different ways: either it was meant only for the wives of the prophet or it was meant generally for all Muslim married women (Jamat-e-islami, Internet).

In the areas of North Pakistan that are Pashtoon (Appendix A) the way of life is dominated by their values and to live the Pashtoon way is a central value. In this Pashtoon law the purdah, the separation of the sexes is one of the central parts. The system of purdah gives protection for the honour of the family, which is one the most important values for this society (Barth 1981:108-110).

Because formal education requires the women to leave the home, it is impossible for many to be educated, especially after the puberty. Because the woman is not counted as economically productive, it is not economically advantageous to out out money for her education. The people value the traditional knowledge of household- and agricultural work that is taught by mother and other women to the younger generation of girls. The woman is expected to fill her place in the household, and she is an important work resource there. Many families could not even afford the time she might want to use for
studies. From the e-mail answers we can see that attitudes towards the actual education are not necessary negative, but the scare economic resources are setting the priorities (S. Willson, D. and C. Hallberg, Jalal, SA, Lekardal, W. and A. Losey, Lothers, J. and E. Baart, Radloff, Sh. Willson, Jadoon).

There are also those that see the formal education as a threat to the traditional division of the women’s and men’s roles in the society, “education ruins a girl…it gives her ideas” (Shaheed & Mumtaz 1996:68). If women had opportunities for education and through this for a paid work they would become economically less dependent on their male relatives, and in this way the control of the men would also lessen.

According the statistics from 1992, a third of the women in Pakistan were married when they were 15 years old. Nine of ten 29-year-olds were married. The weddings I attended during my own time in Pakistan attested to this. A typical woman gives birth to seven or eight living children and most of them are born when women are between 20 and 24 years old. In my time in Chitral, I often heard about a “strong” woman who had given birth to 21 children. In the countryside, women work around 15 to 16 hours a day with cooking, child care, animal care and agriculture. In 1996, only around 2 to 7% of women had a paid work. Upper class women are very different from this statistic, since many of them work as advocates, journalists, architects and even engineers (Shaheed & Mumtaz 1996:59-60). When I lived in Chitral I heard about a woman who works as a pilot! Her choice of profession was general knowledge.

When women are expected to take good care of the household it can be difficult for them to obtain formal education, even when there are opportunities close by her home. The main reason for lack of education seems to be this lack of time, even when there are no ideological reasons against the education. The tiredness, many pregnancies, child care and all the household work, in combination with often poor nutrition make the women give up the idea of studies (Ballara 1992:11). This lack of time and heavy burden of work shows clearly in several of the e-mail answers (Robinson, Lothers, W. and A. Losey, S. Willson, C. Hallberg).
During my stay in Chitral I heard some positive opinions stating education could actually raise the amount of bride price and this way make a woman’s education economically worth pursuing. In some cases also the parents of the bride could ask the husband’s household not to force the bride to do heavy agricultural work because of her education level. One family in quite isolated village of Biori had a married daughter who had a medium level education and she worked as a healthcare provider (Atiullah). This kind of positive attitude came forward also in e-mail answers from Pakistanis. These people are from different areas of the country and most of them are young, around 20 to 30 years old, and educated. This could mean that the young and educated generation is very positive about women’s education. More data should be gathered, though, to be able to say if this is general trend. Three of the answerers pointed out that attitude were in fact, becoming more positive in their home environment (Huzrat, Jadoon, Yousaf).

According the Pakistani law and according the official teaching of Islam women have a right to seek knowledge and get an education. This is also an investment for a society (Parveen 1986:165). The woman has the opportunity as the main caretaker of the children to teach her knowledge to the children and help them to succeed in their education. She is a key to the raising the level of knowledge in her closest circles. One of the answerers to the questionnaire puts it this way: if a man is educated only one person is educated but if a woman is educated whole of her environment will be educated (MZ, SSK, Jalal, Jadoon, Iqbal).
3. Women’s education in Pakistan

3.1 The historical background

"Muslims have, throughout the history, attended to the question of women (sic) instruction within the terms defined by their culture. Thus, women’s education took place mostly either in their own homes or in a home selected in a quarter. Subjects were exclusively religion and home economics, but many women have excelled in Islamic history from time to time in different fields-particularly poetry, Hadith and Sufism. In the late nineteenth century Ashraf Ali Thanavi (d.1942), a scholar from Deoband seminary, wrote an encyclopedic work for women called Bibishti Zewar (Jewelry of Paradise), which gave exhaustive instruction on traditional lines, not only on Islamic subjects but on cookery and hygiene."

(Rahman 1982:76)

Islam constructs genus roles in the social life on the institutional level. It also gives direction to the praxis both culturally and politically. The conservative Islamic parties’ argument is that in the early Islamic state there was no difference between the state and the religion, and thus, they have in the name of the Islam, obtained great influence in the politics of the state of Pakistan. This means that the women of the feminist movement must directly confront the religious authorities and institutions (Rouse 1996:17, 18).

After the independence in 1947, the Islamic religious movements which had been against the colonial power and supported Islamic universalism in Pakistan, formed their own party, Jamaat-e-Islami, under the leadership of Maulana Maududi. They were against the building of the nation and accused the Muslim League, which was lead by the great builder of the nation Muhammed Ali Jinnah, of being too friendly to the Western influences. They understood modern nationalism to oppose to Islamic universalism, through which the fellowship of the Muslim believers, ummah, reaches over the national borders (Rouse 1996:19, 20).

Maulana Maududi has an ideology that almost without exceptions is supported by sources and interpretations inside Islam. According to him there cannot be a synthesis between Islam and, for example, the historic realities or secularism, but it is always an opposite and alternative to the Western secularism. According to this thinking, the politic and religion are totally bound together. The state
becomes an instrument for forming the society according the instructions Allah has given through the Koran and *sunna* (the religious way of living) (Liljegren 1997).

The party of Jamaat-e-Islami has concentrated all of its powers on political activities. They wished not only a country of Muslims like Muhammad Ali Jinnah the builder of Pakistan had in mind, but an Islamic theocracy. They have since 1947 had a systematic politic to influence all the institutions in the country, especially those working with education. This party has never had any wide support by the people in the elections, but has more used other ways to reach its goals, like putting pressure on other politicians, relationbuilding, and aggressive demonstrations (Rouse 1996:19).¹ When the general Zia ul Haq took the power in Pakistan, these Muslims got their chance of wider influence, and the Islamization of the country started.

Zia was in a need of ideological support, because he did not want to have general elections, and in this he got support from the fundamentalist movements. The upper class who wanted to keep their economic privileges were not so willing either to have democratic elections and get the democratic processes started which could affect the ownership of the land and the other privileges they had as a traditional upper class. This islamization has been going on until today’s society. In 1991 the Islamic Sharia law was accepted and for women this has meant changes in all the areas of life: clothing, marriage, divorce, inheritance and last but not least, education (Talbot 1998:270-273, 279-280).

During these years media and education went through the process of Islamization. The curriculum at the schools is based on Islam and everything that was thought to be against the religion was taken away. In the school books women are always those who cook, clean, and take care of the children, and the only professions they are shown to do are cleaning and picking the cotton. The values that are important for Pakistanis like rationalism, religiosity, courage and humanism are connected with men and the negative values like unwillingness to co-operate, thoughtlessness and dishonesty are connected with women. In the history books the women are mentioned rarely and when they are mentioned they are always in the role of mothers or daughters. The fact that women from the beginning were building the new independent nation is forgotten in this description of the history (Shaheed & Mumtaz 1996:69).

¹ A good example on the effects of the last mentioned was seen after the terroristattack on September 11th when a relatively few fundamentalists went out on the streets for aggressive demonstrations but the media made it look like the whole country was on the move.
The politicians in Pakistan have always needed to balance between the different powers in the society those who want to Islamize Pakistan and get the Sharia law as praxis and those who are for modernization and secularization of the society (Talbot 1998:290-332). This balancing act has caused the politics towards women’s and girls’ education to swing from one ideology to another depending on who has had the power at the moment. To date, there have been no real efforts by any of the governments to give all women and girls an opportunity to good education (Shaheed & Mumtaz 1993:65-66).

A functioning democracy which allows all Pakistanis an opportunity for influence on decision making in the country is impossible to reach until reading and writing skills are widespread among even women and language minorities. Only with wide political influence has Pakistan a possibility to meet economic, social and environmental challenges (Talbot 1998:373-374).

In 1998, after the United States’ first attempt at fighting terrorism by military action in Afghanistan, the Pakistani government challenged all the citizens to avoid North American and British products. The English speaking newspapers (The News, Dawn) published at the same time the news that the prime minister at that time, Nawaz Sharif, had been the number highest-spending celebrity for Christmas shopping at Harrods department store in London. Sharifs role as a leader of an Islamic state, and the attention in the media like this one on record for Christmas shopping were in conflict with each other. When general Pervez Musharraf took power in 1999, the people did not protest much, and when I talked with Pakistani friends most of them thought this was the only way out of the corruption towards better democracy. The future will show if the general, or the president as he is now, can provide solutions which the Pakistani people can give their support to.

3.2 The education system

"Advancement and empowerment of women has been the primary human rights objective of the successive government. Accordingly, Pakistan acceded to the Convention of Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women (CEDAW) and is fully committed to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action. The Government has taken number of steps at national level to empower women both in economic and political fields."
(Ministry of foreign affairs, Internet)
It was not a great interest of the British colonial power to provide an education that would encourage creativity and independent thinking. Education of that kind would be rather a threat to the power of the British in India at that time. The education was planned according the needs of the colonial power, and their biggest need was in competent office workers and accountants which could fit into the colonial culture. The educational institutes were also formed in the way that made the traditional and local education system to lose its significance. The knowledge of the English language was necessary if you wanted any kind of career in the colonial circles. Also the Anglo-Indian elite, which was created in this way, was most often recruited from the landowning class in Punjab province, a class who also had very arrogant attitude toward all mother tongue and local education (Shaheed & Mumtaz 1996:61)

When Pakistan became independent in 1947, there was very little formal education and only few universities. The western standard education was something only the richest families could afford by either sending their sons to countries in west or to the expensive boarding schools that existed in the country. The education possibilities have become better during the years of independence, but still only those with money can reach the best education (Pakistan Country Study, Internet).

The difficulties of adapting the education system to the needs of the post-colonial nation have been numerous. Even today, education does not guarantee learning, as the the aim is often simply to get a paper for passed examination. Instead of getting the student to understand the memorization, rather than actual comprehension, becomes the focus of study (Shaheed & Mumtaz 1996:61-65). This we can clearly see from the questionnaires from northern Pakistan. All answerers who had evaluated the education they had contact with said that a lot of it is based on memorization and does not teach critical or analytical thinking. Most of the respondents also said that there are better schools for those who can afford to pay.

In 1992 around 36% of all literate adults and those over 25 years of age had approximately only 1.9 years of formal education. Of the women 22% were literate and those over 25 had approximately only 0.7 years of formal education. Of the women in the rural areas only seven procent were literate, while the literacey rate for women in urban areas was 35% (Pakistan Country Study, Internet). According the
statistics from Rawalpindi 1998-99, 49.7% of the girls in the rural areas of the district were in school. The breakdown of the adult population according to highest level of education attained was as follows:

- 15.6%: adults who had not finished elementary school
- 26.5%: completed elementary school
- 24.6%: completed the intermediate level
- 19.4%: completed matriculation exam
- 7.7%: medium level exam
- 5.1%: higher education

When considering this breakdown, it is important to remember that the breakdown for women always includes higher percentages at the lower end of the scale (Census 1998-99, Lekardal). These statistics are in line with the estimates I received in response to the email questionnaire. Several respondents also mentioned that many children leave the school after only few completed years (Sh.Willson, Robinson, W. och A. Losey).

Formal education is divided into five different levels: elementary (grades 1-6), intermediate (grades 6-8), secondary (grades 9 and 10 which have an examination at the end), matriculation: classes 11 and 12 (which also have an examination at the end in either in natural or social sciences,) and after these, the university level with BA (medium level), MA and PhD degrees (Pakistan Country Study, Internet).

From the e-mail responses we can see that there is also the private sector of education, for example, private English medium schools and Aga Khan Foundation schools in the Northern Areas (S.Willson).

The medium for education is either the national language, Urdu (the usual in government schools), or in English (the usual in private schools). Only around 5% of the population has Urdu as their mother tongue, and a much lower percentage speaks English as a first language (Ethnologue, Internet). Often the students have not even heard Urdu or English spoken before they start their schooling (Radloff, S. och Sh.Willson, D.Hallberg). Members of the upper class usually know both Urdu and English and learn these languages as children.

Of the girls as many as 55% start school, but many quit early--in the North-West Frontier Province as many as 60% There is also an acute lack of educated women teachers in the rural areas (Haque & Batool 1999). These factors are mentioner in several of the e-mail responses and are consistent with
what I personally observed during my time in Pakistan (Robinson, W. och A. Losey, W. och V. Lunsford, Lothers, SSK).

Pakistan has never made any systematic attempt to reach all its girls with elementary education. Many people attribute this to cultural factors. A study conducted by the Ministry of Women’s Development and international aid shows that the main worry for parents was the girls’ honour and security. In the rural areas of Punjab and Baluchistan, when education could be attained in a secure environment, girls’ attendance was much higher (Pakistan Country Study, Internet). It seems that the parents’ priorities economically and socially are the main factor in the education issues, and attention to these priorities when the education is arranged can provide many more girls and women with the opportunity to obtain formal education. Evidence to this effect can also be seen in local answers to the questionnaires, where all of the respondents expressed positive attitudes towards the education of women as long as certain cultural values are not in danger. Several respondents suggested a combination education (theory and practical skills) as a good alternative for women (MZ, SSK, Emanuel, Husrat, Jadoon).

In Pakistan there is only one-third as many schools for girls as there are for boys. Also only 8% of all the vocational colleges are for women. The disparity between women’s and men’s educational opportunities has become larger, even in those years when plans were being made to improve women’s education (Shaheed & Mumtaz 1996:66). It also seems that resources for boys’ schools are usually much more plentiful than those for the girls’ schools (J. & E. Baart). I visited a few girls’ schools in the rural areas and found that they consisted of an empty classroom with one large black board for the teacher to write on. Girls sat on the floor with only a few slates to share between them. Most of the lesson consisted of recitation and memorization of what the teacher had written on the board.

In the urban areas, the quality of the education in private schools is usually quite good, while government schools still offer a somewhat lower lower quality of education. In these areas, however, there are, at least, enough educated teachers. For the families with poor resources, education is a heavy burden because of the high fees and the fact the girls should be taken to the school by a car or a school bus to guarantee their security (Radloff, S. Willson). The rich have ample opportunities for a good education. Even in the private sector, however, boys’ schools tend to have more resources than the
girls’ schools. One response gives an example from a school were there is a class room for scientific experiments for the boys but not for the girls (J. & E. Baart).

In the rural areas, the quality of the education is quite low, especially in the government schools. The teachers do not have enough education and they sometimes do not even know enough Urdu (which is the medium of the education) to be able to explain the concepts to their pupils. In many of the English medium schools where the medium is English, the teachers can not speak enough English themselves (Radloff, S. Willson). The quality also varies between the schools. The private schools often have better quality than the government schools. The usual method of education is to give the information without expecting the students to analyze or do more study on the subject (W. & V. Lunsford).

**3.3 Islam and education**

“Seek knowledge from cradle to the grave” (Jamat-e-islami, internet)

According the prophet Mohammed, all Muslims, both men and women, should seek wisdom and knowledge. According the Haddiths (the collections of the words of the prophet), it is a responsibility of all Muslims to seek knowledge. This knowledge is not divided into holy and secular knowledge, so these words can be interpreted to mean that both men and women, boys and girls, should try to study as long as it is possible for them. In the Surah 35:28 it says:”…Non of His servants except those who have [a deep inner] knowledge fear the God [as He should be feared]” (Bernström 2000), this can be interpreted to support the idea of life long study.

At the same time, as she searches for knowledge and practices her religion, the Muslim woman has a responsibility to take care of her home and to see to the well being of her entire family. She also has a responsibility to obey her husband to guarantee a strong marriage relationship. The woman has, according to this interpretation, full spiritual and intellectual equality with the man, and she is encouraged to practice Islam and develop her intelligence through whole of her life cycle. The men are responsible to guarantee that her tasks are possible to fulfil (Jamat-e-islami, Internet).
According to some other interpretations that are practiced in the country, especially in the rural areas, and most strictly in the North West Frontier Province, the woman is not allowed to leave her house, and she does not have many reasons to do so either. This separation of the sexes is called purdah, and because of it, the girls are educated in girls’ schools or girls’ classes by female teachers, who often do not have enough education themselves. Girls leave school by puberty in order to minimize the risk of losing the family honour, which can lead to long and bloody family feuds (Shaheed & Mumtaz 1996:67, 68). This does not necessary mean that people’s attitudes toward education, in itself, are negative. All of the local answers to the questionnaire said that attitudes toward women’s education were positive in their environment, even those from the North West Frontier Province.

Within Islam the interpretations about the education of women and girls vary greatly. Among some, it is seen as necessary or a human right (Jalal). On the other hand, in one example from Kohistan, it was viewed as unnecessary or even dishonouring (C. Hallberg). Among the different ethnic groups, there are different interpretations of the message of Islam. The Pashtoons, the ethnic majority in the NWFP, interpret Islam such that the total separation of the sexes is necessary. Women should avoid being outside their homes, and only men who are closely related to them can see their faces (D. & C. Hallberg, W. & V. Lunsford, J. & E. Baart). In Gilgit and in the northern Chitral the Ismaelis are in the majority. These Muslims are followers of Aga Khan and they value both women’s and men’s education very highly and educate both sexes as long as it possible for them (Radloff, S. Willson). Often though, even they have to, for the economic reasons, prioritize the education of their sons even though their religious beliefs do not support that priority (S. & Sh.Willson). In this view of Islam, the separation of the sexes is not practiced, and women have a fair amount of freedom to move around. The upper class in the whole tends to have a more modernized view of Islam that the lower classes, and the people in the rural areas separate the sexes more often, even there are some exceptions in this rule.

We can roughly divide the political-religious factions in Pakistan in four different ‘isms’ (Liljegren 1997):

1. Traditionalism: This is based in rural areas. It is loyal to Islam, conservative and absolute in its thinking, and is often against western ideas. According to this interpretation, religion is an objective order, and the ideal order in the society is theocratic and led authoritarian. The interpretation of the
religion is can be seen to be changing with time, but still leads to a traditional division of labour and gender roles between those of men and those of women. This means that ‘education’ for women means training in the traditional skills that are needed in housekeeping.²

2. Fundamentalism: This movement is based in cities; it is loyal to Islam and against western ideas, favors Islamic universalism and is known for “revivalism” (the idea that going back to the original Islamic values is the solution to the problems in the society). This interpretation holds that the order in the society should be based in theocratic authority, and the interpretation of the religion is seen as non-changing. According to this thought women should search for knowledge but also live like good Muslim women and obey their husbands, take care of the home, and take care of the children well. Men are responsible to provide everything their wives need for these tasks.³

3. "Popularism": This movement is based in rural areas; it is loyal to the local society and is provincialistic, collective, and observant of folk Islam (magic, evil eye, belief in numerous magical beings etc.) The ideal order of the society is democratic and tolerant but the interpretation of Islam is seen as non-changing. The situation of women is different between different ethnic groups, as is the observance (or non observance) of purdah.⁴

4. Modernism: This movement is based in large cities; it is loyal to the nation of Pakistan and is nationalistic, secular, capitalistic or socialistic, and individualistic. According to modernist thinking, the society should be democratic and tolerant and the interpretation of Islam changing. Women should educate themselves and work at least until they get married. The feminist movement of Pakistan is strongest in this ideology.⁵

This division gives a simplified picture of a very complex situation and is used here more as a tool for readers that are unfamiliar with Pakistani situation. There are different ways of thinking in all geographical areas and there are many local variations of these themes. This gives a picture, though, of how these different main streams of thought are trying to lead the nation toward different goals.

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² These ideas you find often in Kohistan, Swat and in tribal areas of North West Frontier Province.
³ The religious party of Jamat-e-Islami is a good example on this thinking.
⁴ I met mostly these kinds of thoughts when I lived in rural areas in Chitral valley.
⁵ The upper class has mainly this thinking.
4. Attitudes toward the education of women and girls in Northern Pakistan

"Because a girl is a mother of the future. If mother is educated the whole generation will be good and different. As Napoleon says: 'Give me a good mother and I will give you good nation.' After marriage a girl has to look after her family. If she is educated she can look after it? in a better way than any uneducated girl. In this modern age education is very important for women." (sic) (Sajida Iqbal)

“If a man is educated, only that man is educated. If a woman is educated, many people around her also become educated.” (sic) (MZ)

“Fortunately there is a great awakening towards the importance of and necessity towards girls/women education in all fields. At government level efforts are being made to bring such education at their doorsteps. In rural areas, which are often cut off from big cities, transport is a big problem. Girls/women are not allowed to venture out alone. Poverty is a big hindrance. This promotes child labor, child marriage; social prejudices still exist among many tribal areas. Education of Girls and women is a must. Already much time has been wasted. Our country needs a crash programmed for such education. For nation building men and women must work hand in hand and shoulder to shoulder." (sic) (Enid Jalal)

4.1 The cities

The cities of the province Punjab—Islamabad, Lahore, and Abottabad—show mostly positive attitudes toward the education of women, and also contain more opportunities for both formal education and work than anywhere else in Northern Pakistan. Peshawar, the capitol of the North West Frontier Province, is strongly influenced by the Pashtoon social field, and here we can find more negative attitudes. The system of purdah is followed more strictly here that in the other cities, but the trends are the same. Peshawar is also marked by the almost one million Afghan refugees that live in the city. Their opportunities for education are generally very few, and the men who are usually responsible for providing for the family are either dead, handicapped, or mentally influenced by the war in Afghanistan (Radloff, W. och V. Lunsford).

The special mark of the cities is that all of the interpretations of Islam are represented in the society. They have mixed population, where interpretation of Islam varies from the most conservative to the very modern. A family practicing strict purdah can live as neighbour to a family were all of the girls
are educated and are going out without the veil. In Islamabad and Lahore some women even wear western-style clothing (S. Willson).

For example, in Islamabad many people are coming from elsewhere in the country to work for the government or for a better life after they have retired from a government job. Because of this, the education level in the city is generally higher than many other places. The attitudes toward women’s education also vary from very positive to the negative (Radloff, S. Willson). In general, though, the positive attitudes are ruling in the city, since a girl with even a little bit of education has better possibilities for a good marriage, and this can raise the status of the whole family. The education of women is seen as a resource for the family, and many see that women with education have better skills for motherhood than illiterate ones. They can be involved with their children’s education, can take good care of the children’s health and have knowledge of children’s development (several answers). The more education a family has the more positive they are to the education of women in general (Sh. Willson, Radloff). There are also those who see women’s education only as a status symbol and not as a real advancement in the level of knowledge in the society (Robinson).

The quality of the schools in the cities is relatively good compared to that of the schools in the rural areas. The attitudes are generally positive even to the higher education of the women; those who have the economic resources want their girls to get education (W. & A. Losey). The local respondents say that girls should complete 12 classes (matriculation) some say that they could even continue for the MA. We can also see that an attitude change is on the way when it comes to the education of the women. The system of purdah is seen as a hinderance but as social roles are changing and women have more opportunities to study even outside their homes than just a few years ago (Husrat, Jadoon). The local respondents thought that Pakistan is on its way to be a “modern” society, and education of the women was seen as an important part of this process.

Some professions like those of marketing, business, policework, dancing, acting, singing and driving cars as profession, were seen as not suitable for women at all. Computing, health care, and teaching were both popular and suitable careers for women, mostly because these are good for the whole society. If a woman is working with business world it presents difficulties for her family and the atmosphere at her work place, because people have so many prejudices toward women in male-
dominated professions. To be a police officer was seen as too hard physically and also involved working too closely with fellow police men. The entertainment professions are seen as connected to immoral lifestyle in the whole country. Respondents also felt that negative attitudes toward women’s education were caused by illiteracy and poor education and that un-educated people could not see the importance of education since they do not have personal experience in that realm (Emanuel).

Some women who have professional training and take jobs in their field of study have the opportunity for further education and advancement in their profession, but others have to quit working because their husbands do not want them to spend too much time away from their families (E. and J. Baart). Some also choose for themselves to leave their professions once they have children. Good housekeeping is valued highly, often more highly than formal education, even in the cities (S. Willson).

I have met several women who work in the health care sector in the cities, and have learned that there are many computer and language courses available for women. I remember a huge commercial on the main street close to our house in Peshawar that said:”Brain’s Basic Computing for Ladies and Children.” From my own experience, though, I know that those women (both foreign and local) who move outside their homes on the streets are often sexually harassed, even when they have culturally acceptable clothing (this is known as”eve teasing”).

In the cities there are very clear differences between those who have economic capital and those who do not, and magnitude of this difference is moving. Sometimes women and children are forced to work so that their family will not starve. This has led to conflicts inside the families and to desperate deeds to keep the family honour: suicides and abuse. You can also see women with their small children in burqa (a cloth that covers the body totally) in the streets begging. When the economic resources are so limited that there is not enough food, formal education of the children is not an option.

4.2 The rural areas
In this I include partly some rural areas in the Punjab province – areas around Murree, Rawalbindi and Abottabad, and partly some areas in North West Frontier Province – the mountain areas of Swat, Kohistan and Chital. A large part of the population in these areas is either farmers or shepherds, and in many villages half of the population is transhuman, they spend half of the year in the meadows at high
altitudes and return to their village during the winter. In some houses part of the family moves to the meadows in the summer while part stays to take care of the small fields close to the house in the village.

The girls from the upper classes in these areas have quite good opportunities for education. Villages closer to the cities provide more opportunities for education. On the other hand, many of the villages far away from cities do not have any girls’ schools at all. Those who have the money can send their girls to private schools which provide quite good quality education. It is difficult to get qualified teachers to move to the rural areas far away from the cities, and for this reason there is a lack of teachers in many of these areas as well as a lack of educational materials (Lekardal, Robinson, A. och W. Losey, Lothers, MZ, SSK).

The evaluation of school attendance in the rural areas shows that growing numbers of girls attend schools, while the great majority of the women as young as twenty have very little or no education at all. One of the respondents had met only one woman from rural areas who was over thirty and literate (Lothers). The girls from richer families and those closer to cities are more likely to attend school and tend to continue their education for longer than others (W. & V. Lunsford). Proximity to the school is an important factor. If the school is close, the girls can walk there, assuming that they are allowed to leave their home. Those families who move closer to cities during the winter season have better educational possibilities than those who stay in the villages farther away the year around (MZ, SSK, J. och E. Baart). The value of education is often in the fact that they have a chance for a better marriage. Education can, in some cases, be seen as a substitute addition to a bride price for the poor (Robinson).

The girls are often seen as having less value than boys, and families do not want to invest in their education, because they are to be married away anyway. Some also think that it is more difficult to marry an educated girl, because she might not be an obedient wife. Most of the families do not, for these reasons, want to invest a lot of money in women’s and girls’ education even though attitudes have become more positive in the last ten years (Lekardal & E. och J. Baart). A positive change in attitudes seems to be on the way everywhere in the rural areas. There is a difference between the generations, and the younger parents want to educate their daughters more that the elder ones did. Those with education have more positive attitudes toward education for all of their children.
In general, the younger generation in the rural areas has a more positive attitude toward the education of women than the older generation does, but in some cases these attitudes have actually been passed on from parents who wanted to give their children more opportunities than they got themselves. Both religion and other secular education are seen to be very important. Once women have married, their opportunities for education may be limited to religious education within their homes together with housekeeping duties. (W. & V. Lunsford, MZ, SSK).

In almost all answers we can see that, if classes would be provided in the homes or very close to home without high cost, most of the women could attend these. If these classes would also teach some practical skills together with health care and hygiene it would be a great benefit for whole families, especially for the children since the infant mortality rate is still very high. In these circumstances, even the women in Kohistan, where purdah is practiced in its strictest form, would be able to attend the classes. They could learn things that they could use in their everyday life in housekeeping which is considered to be their most important duty in the life.

Many women themselves have a positive attitude toward their daughters’ education. They feel grief and shame that they themselves have so little formal education and want their daughters to get better chances. They would like their girls to have opportunities they never had themselves. Still, for economic reasons, they usually in fact prioritise the education of their sons. Many of the older women do not have an interest in learning to read and write, since they have managed most of their lives without those skills. Some are interested, however, in learning some skills which would help them to earn some more money for their family. The upper class does not always have a more positive attitude toward women’s education. It is, in fact, the closeness to the schools that is a more important factor. All of the local respondents expressed positive attitudes toward the education of women and girls, at least as long as it was not against the system of purdah. One of them pointed out, though, that many men in the rural areas do not believe that their wives can learn new things. (MZ, SSK).

In the Kohistan area we can find the most negative attitudes toward women’s and girls’ education. The Kohistani people are quite proud over their strict purhah, and they do not most often educate their girls and women. In their eyes, this is a sign that they are good Muslims, because their women stay inside
their houses. Any offence against *purdah* results in serious punishment. The honour of the family depends on how well they protect their women. Kohistani people also have very limited economic resources, and these are used to educate boys. The girls usually marry early, often before they have turned fifteen, although they may not move into their husbands’ homes until a couple of years later (C. och D. Hallberg). In the Indus Kohistan area, women’s literacy rate is estimated to be around 0-1%. Some of them learn to read (recite) the Koran (D. och C. Hallberg).

Similar attitudes can be also found in tribal areas of the North West Frontier Province, where tribal law, rather than Pakistani law, is followed. These areas are situated in the border areas between Pakistan and Afghanistan close to the city of Peshawar.

Another example of a group with generally negative attitudes toward women’s education coupled with very limited opportunities can be found in the nomadic Gujur people. Most of the Gujur think that women’s education is unnecessary, and they have generally very negative attitude towards the idea. According to some Gujurs own words, they do not want their girls to learn to write love letters to boys. Some men want their women to learn to recite the Koran but nothing more. The women are also extremely busy with housekeeping in nomadic circumstances, so that they would not have time to study, even if given the possibility (W. & A. Losey).

Very many children who have started schooling quit early. The language barrier makes it difficult to take advantage of those opportunities for education which do exist. Those nomads, who, in spite of difficulties manage to get an education, very seldom come back to their home areas (W.& A. Losey). The nomadic life style does not encourage lend itself well to formal education, since it is the practical skills and knowledge the Gujurs need in their every day life.

Educational institutions are few in the mountainous northern Hazara district where the Gujurs mostly stay. The Gujurs also move with their animals periodically to different places, and the school year does not fit in this schema. Even in areas where schools do exist, attendance is very low, even among the teachers, who often live far away from the villages. As there is no system in place to evaluate their work teachers many times just take their salaries without actually teaching (Robinson, W. & A. Losey).
If a pupil in these circumstances learns to read and write, she has learnt more that most (W. & A. Losey).

In the valley of Chitral where I have lived, the villages which have a Pashtoon majority (close to the Lowari pass in the southern most part of the district) display more negative attitudes toward the education of women than the villages where some other ethnic group, for example Chitralis, is a majority. Even so, I have talked with several people in villages who are positive toward their girls’ education, if there is a school close by, and I have met those who are positive even toward women’s education. One of our friends has a married daughter who is working as a health care consultant, and he says that if a girl has an education, you can get a better bride price on her and also can expect her not to work in the fields. Another friend has a sister who travels to the city to get her graduation, and he thinks everybody should have a right to get a good education. He travelled himself to Karachi to study computing (Atiqullah, Fakhruddin). During my time in Chitral, I met one young woman who spoke English. Women in her family pointed her out proudly as “the one who is educated”. I never learned where she got her education.

All the villages in southern part of Chitral that I have visited have schools, and most of them include schools for girls, even though some of these are unused. My guess would be that 70% of the girls go to school for at least few years. There are also close to the main road English medium private schools where the language of instruction is English. Most of the women can not continue studying or working outside their homes after they have married.

When I lived in one of the villages in the area I was able to follow one family in close interaction. This family had more economic resources that many others in the village and they put a lot of money in to educate two children in an English medium school. These children, a boy around eleven and a girl around nine, put their school uniforms on every morning and walked to the school few kilometres from the village. The girl came home every day crying and begging not to be sent to the school anymore. I understood from her that the teacher was quite hard handed with her. Both children where encouraged by the family to come to me and practice their English. The boy could say few words in English and read some without understanding a lot about what he read, while the girl could not speak any English at all, even after several years in the English medium school. When my husband met the principal and the
teachers at that school, they told him that it was impossible to teach in English when the children did not have any knowledge in that language and most of them did not know any Urdu either, only their own mother tongue when they started at the school. This family was willing to put a large mount of money into the education of these children but got not much more than status with their money, which can be valuable sometimes.

4.3 Northern Areas

In Hunza- and Gilgit in Northern Areas the Ismaeli sect of Islam is in majority. They believe in education and see it as everybody’s right. The Aga Khan Foundation that is Ismaeli leader Aga Khan’s own aid organization is influential in the area and they have both schools and health care facilities. This is why I want to discuss this somewhat unique area in its own chapter.

The estimate for girls’ education in Hunza is 85%, for the city of Gilgit 60-70% and for Shina speaking areas of Gilgit 40-50%. For the married women in the city of Gilgit is around 40-50% and for the Shina speaking areas in Gilgit 25-30% (S.Willson och Radloff). These percentages come close to those in cities even these areas are mainly rural and quite isolated. But even here we can see that closeness to the larger towns or villages influences educational opportunities.

In Gilgit the attitudes toward girls’ education are positive. In the city of Gilgit there has been a lot of work done for the girls’ education during the last fifteen years, and the girls’ schools in the area are more than full of girls. In the more rural areas the possibilities are fewer and for the poor a heavy burden (Radloff). For women the education is not usually seen as necessary, because they have whatever education they had at the time before their marriage, and it is taken for granted that they do not study after they have married. The women themselves often point out that they have gotten an education but can at the same time tell you that they can not read. This is nothing they are ashamed of, though. Many families think that elementaryschool is enough for the girls, especially in the more rural areas. In the city of Gilgit it is a matter of pride for the family if a girl has taken the matrix, and if she also has the two extra years in college, the family will point it out to everybody. Girls in Gilgit have the opportunity to take four years of teachers’ education, but the government schools have not been able to hire any new teachers and the private schools pay very low salaries (Radloff).
In Hunza women can move quite freely outside their homes and many schools are in walking distance, so girls can attend them. People here value education highly and the only hindering factor is economic resources. All of the families who possibly can send their girls to school and almost everybody wants to have as long and broad of an education as possible. When the girls marry, they quite seldom continue to study. In Hunza even married women can work outside their homes, though, and many do. They work as office assistants and secretaries for different NGOs (non-governmental organisations) and also as teachers and in health care. If the opportunity for higher education does not exist, the girls may be sent to live with relatives in cities like Islamabad and in this way they are given a chance even for higher education (S. Willson).
5. The results

From these data, we can see that the major factors affecting Pakistani attitudes toward education of women and girls are religion, education level, class, and degree of urbanization. In these factors, ethnicity and economic resources also have an influence. It seems that the most important hindrances to girls’ education are the lack of economic resources combined with a lot of house work and the system of purdah. Relatively few have negative attitudes towards education in itself, if only appropriate education would exist, for example, a combination of theory and practical skills.

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu speaks about distinction; something that makes that a person is associated with certain social structures but not the others and in this way certain fields – social, religious, cultural kind are created with their own recognizable signs. He has also created an interesting form for this (Bourdieu 1986):

\[(\text{habitus}) \ (\text{capital}) \ + \ \text{field} \ = \ \text{practic} \ \text{– to make your own forms for realization known}\]

It would be interesting to investigate how this would be realized in the Pakistani women’s educational situation. For example:

\[(x)(y) \ + \ z \ = \ xyz \ - \ q\]

where the different variables would be:

\[x = \text{uses shalwar kameez with expensive cloth, tight around body and with high openings on the sides, self confident in shops, uses expensive sun glasses}\]
\[y = \text{western education, economic resources, relatively equal dialogue with husband}\]
\[z = \text{urban, upper class, modernistic religion as field}\]
\[xyz = \text{relatively much freedom of movement, opportunity to study and work outside the home}\]
\[q = \text{speaks something else that Urdu or English, takes care of the simple housework herself}\]
This form very effectively tells what you are not: a woman from rural areas that is living under *purdah* and without opportunity to study. We have here a system what Bourdieu calls *distinctive signs*, those that create the *distinction*. This is just a simplified playful experiment with Bourdieu’s theory, but gives some ideas for possible future study of the data collected in this study.

The most negative attitudes can be found amongst the conservative Pashtoons in the rural areas, who also often have meagre economic resources. This is true also among the nomadic Gujurs who see formal education as unnecessary, because it is the practical skills which make the difference between life and death in their nomadic life style.

In the rural areas the most positive attitudes are found among the Ismaelis (the followers of Aga Khan), among the younger generation, and also among those who have some education themselves. Religion in itself does not seem to cause any negative attitudes toward the education of women as long as it does not interfere with the more valued preservation of family honour. Very often it is the lack of economic resources and lack of schools or teachers which stands in the way of the education of women. If educational opportunities were available close to home or inside the home (correspondence studies) almost everybody would accept it.

It seems that an attitude change is occurring in the society. The younger generation is more positive towards women’s education and places a higher priority on it than the older generation did. In some cases, the parents are also encouraging this attitude change so that their children will have more opportunities that they had themselves. It is interesting to see that all the Pakistanis (ten answers) that filled in the e-mail questionnaire were very positive to women education, at least as long as it did not conflict with the cultural system of separating the sexes (SKK, MZ). Many also mentioned that if there were study groups for women in homes or close to home, they could be part of these, and it would also be good for their work with housekeeping. Some also see this as a key to raising the education level in the whole society. The local informants were themselves quite young and well educated, but even one older woman was very positive. This woman, unlike many others in her generation, had a university education herself and came from the Christian minority (Jalal).
A good example of a creative educational project in was started by Allama Iqbal Open University. They offer women education secondary level with tailor-made courses in their homes and one hour mentoring a week close to their homes. This education combines traditional skills with more the more formal style of education given in other schools, like mathematics and science. This also gives the women the opportunity to maintain their honour and to study without neglecting their housekeeping tasks, thus removing many possible points of conflict with their male family members. The families also save money, since they do not need to buy school uniforms or travel. The attendance in this program has been high, and many have also graduated (Haque & Batool 1999)

One man from Hunza tells in his answer how he would like to change the education situation in Northern Pakistan if he had the opportunity. He would have more educated teachers, computers at schools, and a different kind of pedagogy that was not just based on memorization. He would also encourage the families to support their girls in studies and free them from some of their work load so that they would have time to study (SA).

Even with the positive trends in attitudes amongst the younger generation, there are still many hindrances left to a general raising of the overall educational level of women. The language politic that makes Urdu and English as medium of instruction makes it difficult for many. Education is mainly based on memorization and teaches very little analytical skill or understanding of the taught material. The contents of the curriculum are islamised to the point that they teach one-sided thinking and give a simplified and polarized picture of the world. Obedience to the authorities is stressed, while critical thinking and creativity are neither taught, nor encouraged.

Economic resources are scarce for large part of the population, and people give priority to education of the boys, because that is economically more productive. In the rural areas there is a lack of both educational opportunities and teachers, especially women teachers who can teach girls, as well as a great lack of educational materials. Even in the cities the better educational opportunities are available to those with good economic resources. The system of separating the sexes makes it difficult for women and girls to travel farther away from their homes, and alternative educational possibilities are still very few.
Many see the importance of women getting more knowledge to be able to better take care of their homes and children, and many think that women should be able to work, at least in some professions, to be part of building the society’s structure and economy. The upper class often get their education abroad or in expensive private schools with Western-type curriculum and are not keen on rest of the society getting other knowledge than the islamised type which is taught in government schools since it is their interest to keep the power position they enjoy. Government schools, as we have seen, tend not meet the needs of the women and girls. Most often government projects aim to raise the quantity, rather than the quality, of the education.

The results of this study show that attitudes toward women’s and girls education are mostly positive and the trend amongst the younger generation is becoming even more positive. One of the informants states this by saying: “Nowadays, everybody likes female education” (SSK). Many see that women have to have education to be able to be part of the building of the nation in many different areas, but especially in the homes and the raising of the next generation. Several of the informants think that women are much better than men in educating the people around them: if a woman is educated all the people around her will be too (SSK & Jadoon & Iqbal) But the resources for education, creative solutions which fit the social structures, and the political willingness from the leaders are all lacking.
6. Epilogue

Writing this paper has been both interesting and challenging. I am not thinking of leaving this subject but want to gain a deeper understanding about it and learn more. I am hoping to go back to Pakistan, and when I do, I will certainly continue with this subject. I have learnt that willingness and need for more knowledge is there if the normal school-bound education thinking is given up and programmes are adapted to fit the Pakistani women’s living situation. I am sure that if women are able to gain more knowledge, this will have an effect on the whole society in better health, fewer accidents in homes, better economy for families, and a general rise in the overall education level.

The message of Islam that has been many times misinterpreted by both Muslims and others is mercy, knowledge-seeking and peace-loving. The religion does not need to be a hindrance for women’s education, because in it the seeking of knowledge is an important part. There is a fear in West of Islam, and in media we see demonstrators in black clothes screaming Allahu Akbar and we connect Islam with terrorism. This makes many Muslims want to distance themselves from everything Western, including the Western style of education that is based of Western world view.

If the education were based on the values which are important to Muslims (I am not saying with this that the Islamic world is managing better than west to live according to their values, but they are there as an ideal) like harmonic family life, healthy way of living, respect toward older people and respectable clothing and behaviour, and were also tailored to include skills and knowledge that are important for women in their daily lives and would help to improve their quality of life, and if these educational opportunities were arranged close to homes, most women would be able to get an education without it costing too much.

A very interesting government campaign I observed while working in Pakistan was one about family planning. Everywhere in the country, in the media and even in the smallest villages, you could see posters and information on this family planning campaign with the logo of green key and family with two children, one boy and one girl as an example of a sound and healthy family. People could easily obtain variety of birth control and also information about it. When I visited a house in one of the very isolated villages in Chitral, where women seldom or never could go outside their own gardens, the first
thing they wanted to know, even with the lack of communication skills between us, was what kind of birth control I use (I have two children, a boy and a girl!). From this experience, I think the government could easily do something about women’s education situation if they had the political williness to do it.

The Western media is and continues to be negative toward the east and Islam. The media is not only controlled by WASP (White Anglo Saxon Protestants) but also unfortunately many IWP (Insensitive White Persons). The list of our heroes is almost without exceptions white, and who is on the top of the list of bad guys, if not the leaders of the Muslim nations (Akbar 1992:227). As long as we continue our attitude as IWP, we also put forth more hindrances to the education of women in the Islamic world and support the rise of more intolerant and anti-west movements of Islam.

While, from a feministic point of view, women should have a right to education for other reasons than just being a good mother, wife, or housekeeper, but the pressures to change values to those of of the aid-giving countries create only negative feelings among many Muslims, and the changes that come this way can be understood as one more attack against Islam. A good education which fits the cultural constraints of the environment where the people actually live can raise the quality of life and also the understanding of the larger world in totally different way.
Appendix A

A map of Pakistan
Appendix B

E-mail questions for foreigners in Pakistan:

Background:

Name:

Age (encircle): 10-20, 20-30, 30-40, 40-50, 50-60, 60-

For how long time have you been living/working in Pakistan?

In what areas of the country have you been staying?

What kind of work have you been involved in?

Questions:

1. In the areas where you have been staying/working, could you give a rough estimate of how many
   a. of the girls (in percent) get any education:

   b. of the women (in percent) get any education:

2. Please, indicate any geographical or social differences:

3. What is in your opinion the quality of their education? Please, indicate any geographical or social differences:

4. What kinds of attitudes/opinions have you met toward education of
a. girls?

b. women?

5. Please, indicate any geographical or social differences:

6. Are there any other observations you have made regarding this subject that you think may be of any help to me when undertaking this study?
E-questions for Pakistani:

Background:

Name:

Age (encircle): 10-20, 20-30, 30-40, 40-50, 50-60, 60-

In what areas of the country have you been living/working?

What is your occupation:

Questions:

1. In areas where you have been living/working, could you give a rough estimate of how many

   a. of the girls (in percent) get any education?

   b. of the women (in percent) get any education?

2. Please, indicate any geographical or social differences:

3. In your opinion,

   a. should girls get education?

   b. if yes, how many years?

   c. should women get education?

   d. if yes, is there any education/occupation that is not suitable for women?
4. **Please motivate your answers to the questions above.**

5. **In your opinion, what do most people in your neighbourhood think about**
   a. girls’ education
   b. women’s education

6. **In your opinion, what are the reasons behind these opinions?**

7. **Are there any other observations you have made that you think may be of any help to me in understanding this subject better?**
References:


**Articles:**


**Interviews:**


Hallberg, Dan: has lived and worked in Northern Pakistan twelve years with a language- and aid-related project in co-operation with the university in Islamabad. Has also visited a lot the area of rural Kohistan in northern Pakistan.

Willson, Steve: has lived and worked in Pakistan twelve years. Works with a language- and aid-related project in Hunza, Northern Areas.

**E-mail answers:**

Baart, Joan & Esther: 11 years of experience in Kalam and Islamabad.

Emanuel, Angela: Islamabad. Medical student.


Iqbal, Sajida: Punjab and Sindh. Works with the church of Pakistan.

Hallberg, Calinda: 12 years of experience in Peshawar, Gilgit, Kohistan and Islamabad.

Husrat, Raja: Abottabad. Language consultant.


Lekardal, Wenny: Rawalbindi, Sahiwal and Taxila. A nurse who has worked in Pakistan since 1969.

Lothers, Laura: Three years of experience. Abottabad and Murree.

Losey, Wayne & Amy: Three and half years of experience. Hazara area, Gujurs.
Lunsford, Wayne & Valerie: Three and half years of experience. Peshawar and Swat.
MZ: a man from Kalam. Language consultant.
Robinson, Mark: Three years of experience. Abbottabad, NWFP and Islamabad.
SA: a man from Hunza. Language consultant.
SSK: a man from Kalam. Skogsvaktare.
Willson, Sharon: 14 years of experience. Hunza and Islamabad.
Willson, Steve: 14 years of experience. Hunza and Islamabad.
Yousaf, Rabacca: Lahore. Theology student.

Web sites:

Ethnologue: http://www.ethnologue.com


Other materials:

My own notes and data from the years 1998-2000.