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Sexual Division of Labour and Son Preference in Rural Bangladesh

Introduction

WHATEVER the underlying reasons, son preference exists in Hindu, Muslim and Chinese societies. The cross-cultural study by Freedman and Coombs (1974) and the worldwide survey of Williamson (1976) are among the better known studies on son preference. Several reasons are attributed to the prevalence of strong son preference in some societies : some are religious, some economic and some cultural.

The economic reasons are especially strong in predominantly rural societies but exist also elsewhere. The earliest, longest and perhaps the most intensive attempt to 'sell' birth control to an Indian village was the Khanna study. From the Khanna study Wyon and Gordon (1971) have given several reasons for wanting sons. Sons may add to the earning power of the family whereas few Indian daughters work for money, and if they did, they would earn less money and probably work for a shorter time. If they were married, their money would go to their husband's family. In addition, sons are more helpful dur-

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ing parents' old age in a society where there are few alternative sources of support. Another function of sons is to perpetuate the family name. And finally, the defence of the family and its interest was mentioned.

More recently the World Fertility Survey (1983) found that of the 40 developing countries studied, countries with tha strongest son preference were : Bangladesh, Jordan, Korea, Nepal, Pakistan and Syria. A study of rural households from all over Bangladesh (Mannan 1985) found clear evidence of son preference in Bangladesh. The author concluded :

> Most couples are guided in their desire for additional children by an ideal sex composition which is commonly found to comprise two to three sons and one daughter. . . The desire to have at least two (and preferably three) sons and one daughter by the couples appears to be the most important determinant of fertility behaviour and contraceptive use in Bangladesh *(ibid:* 358-9).

The 1975 Bangladesh Fertility Survey also reveals a strong preference for sons : for women with no living children (who wanted another child) 62.f per cent preferred a boy, less than 2 per cent preferred a girl, and 36 per cent were indiffeient (Government of Bangladesh 1978 : 88). Other evidence of son preference in Bangladesh comes from the studies done by Inkcles and Smith (1975), Repetto (1970) and Welch (1974). The findings by Khan and Swenson (1978 : 209) from two villages in Bangladesh also indicate that number of sons is an important predictor of male sterilisation : among the *vasectomised* clients, 23 per cent nad one son and 34 per cent had two living sons while the corresponding figures with one and two children were less than 5 per cent and (less than) 10 per cent respectively. But the most persuasive evidence comes from the study done by Cain (1977 : 201-27), Cain showed that high fertility, parlicularly having more sons is rational.

Objectives of the Study

Parental preferences for son cannot be seen as an isolated act of attitudes, but as attitudes which fit into a social setting. Preferences regarding the sex of children anse as the product of many decisions of different kinds made in course of running the family, farm, business, political alliances and other institutions.

Demographic behaviour cannot be described, analysed, explained or understood without reference to the social system. Again, society is not merely a mechanical aggregate of individuals. In reality, society is the product of interaction between people, of a specific system of relations between the latter, and in particular one of production relations that constitute the foundation of society. The decisive force behind the development of society is the mode of

production, which embodies the productive forces and production relations in the process of producing material wealth.

In an attempt to answer some of the questions regarding son preference, we have explored children's work pattern using 'time budget' data. An important factor here is the age and sex composition of the population. The sex distribution of the population also influences the level of production ia so far as there exist sectors of the economy where it is preferable to employ either male or female labour.

That children in the developing countries, and particularly in areas where a rural economy predominates, are valued for economic reasons is well documented. But the value of children is an elusive and complex phenomenon; both the coatent and the intensity of the value of children vary at different times and at different stages of the life cycle. Again, children are not bundles of homogeneous commodity, there are boys and girls. And in the context of Badgladesh, the value of a male child is different from that of a female child.

Males and females differ in their roles at various stages in their life cycle and also in their participation in economic and other activities. Parental desire for a specific number of children of a particular sex may depend on their perception of the various activities performed by male and female children. The sex preference of parents for their children is influenced by the mode of production in the society under study.

In South Asian countries and particularly in Bangladesh, work in the field is generally carried out by men; while women take charge of the post-harvest operations. In most African countries where hoe agriculture is predominant, however, women work in the field much longer hours and are considered to be economically valuable to their families. This economic value of women in Africa is reflected in the institution of 'bride wealth'. In contrast, the low economic status of women in Bangladesh, India and other countries of the South Asian region is reflected in the 'dowry system'.

Different studies on the value of children have shown that while the emotional (psychological) rewards of having children may be assumed to provide one of the main motivations for parents in both the industrial and peasant societies, the economic rewards from children may be assumed to provide an important motivation for parents in peasant societies.

Nancy Williamson (1976) has put forward various hypotheses regarding son preference. For example, we may cite the following :

1. Parents will prefer sons to daughters if sons are economically more productive than daughters.
2. Parents will want a predominance of sons if they expect to rely primarily on sons during their old age.
3. Parents will prefer sons to daughters if having sons is positively associated with greater status, security and influence.

4- Parents will want a predominance of boys if it is important to havs a male heir to provide continuity of the family name.
5. Parents will prefer a predominance of boys if the residence pattern is partrilocal and the family system is patrilineal.
6. Parents will prefer to have predominance of sons if 'survival' of the family depends on male members in a society characterised by conflict and violence.
7. Parents will desire a predominance of sons if they are living in a rural area rather than in an urban area.

In this paper, we shall mainly focus our attention on the economic importance of children. Information on children's activities (productive and household) might provide answers to many puzzles regarding sex preference of children.

If we understand better the various contributions that male and female children make to the household, we may also understand better the underlying reasons for sex preference in Bangladesh[1]. To see the economic roots of sex preference, we have explored children's work pattern by age and sex using 'time budget' data from our study area.

Since the role of family is central both for production and consump! ion, especially in a peasant society like Bangladesh, we need to look more closely at various activities performed by children of each sex. We will maintain that differential contribution of the two sexes provides the economic basis for favouring sons over daughters. We shall begin with a brief review of p>ast efforts in this area and a discussion of the issues involved with respect to 'time budget' data.

Time Use Data in Bangladesh—An Overview

Bangladesh has a relatively abundant body of data showing time use of men and women separately. Prominent among the various studies on time use are those of Farouk and AH (1975), Cain (1977 : 201-27) and Barkat-e-Kiiuda (1978, 1982, 1983). Farouk and Ali estimated how an average individual spends his or her 24 hours of the day. Information on time use was obtained mainly for the household head and to some extent other members over 18 years of age were covered by the study. The 24 hours preceding the day of interview constituted the period of reference.

Cain collected time use data for every fortnight, referring to the 24 hours preceding the day of the survey, Caldwell *et al.* (1980) and Khuda combined

1. These aspects can be more objectively defined and more comparably measured than preferences but, at the same time, are likely to be correlated with preference in a systematic way.

observation and interview methods in their study. Since rural Bangladesh is characterised by seasonality of agriculture, the studies by Farouk and Caldwell have failed to capture the element of seasonality altogether. Besides, these studies are based on rather limited observations. The studies by Khuda gave due attention to the element of agricultural seasonality.

Time Use Data from the RSP

One of the most comprehensive efforts to collect time use data in Bangladesh has been the Rural Studies Project (RSP) 'time use' data. It was comprehensive because the study areas were selected from four different agro-ecological zones—and information was collected for a period of two years for each member of the household five years and over. Time use data was generated fortnightly referring to the 24 hours preceding the day of the survey. We have used data separately for the peak and the slack periods which take into account the element of agricultural seasonality in Bangladesh.[2]

Quality of the Time Use Data

There are serious methodological problems in collecting accurate time allocation data. Our study was concerned with the way in which 24 hours of the previous day (main emphasis was from 6.00 a.m. to midnight) were allocated to various activities by all persons five years and older according to sex and age groups. The data for a particular day were collected by interviewing the household members on the following day (although these were checked and supplemented by occasional observations). One major problem connected with time use data based on recall method is that it suffers from memory lapse and inaccuracy of time reporting on the part of the respondents. In the developed countries, work is organised around time standards and the respondents can recall accurately the number of hours worked on different activities. On the contrary, in rural Bangladesh where most people are illiterate the number of hours spent on various activities on a particular day may not be reported accurately.

Appropriate methods for collecting time use data are much debated among researchers. Certainly, direct observation provides the most reliable estimate. But in any large-scale survey, the observation method may not be feasible because it is the most expensive and time consuming. Data can be collected when

2 Agriculture in Bangladesh is characterised by seasonal peaks. The period between August to October is a slack period; the *aus* paddy is harvested by July and during the rainy seasons the field goes under water (with occasional floods) and outside agricultural activity (in the field) is at a minimum. For the methodology of data collection and the nature add extent of information obtained in the RSP, see Khan (1981).

the sample size is relatively small when data are collected over a short period- Again, the participant observation method suffers from the possibility of influencing the work behaviour of the population (i.e. continuous observat on by an outsider may influence the pattern of work).

Whether or not time use data collected on recall method are worthy of analysis is a question of judgement rather than science. So long as reporting errors are not systematically associated with any particular age-sex group, we can learn much about the pattern of time use by male and female children.

With this backgroundg, we shall present our findings from the RSP data—with a brief discussion of the methodology involved.

Economic Activities of Male and Female Children

In order to present the results simply, we have grouped various activities performed by household members into seven broad categories which have bsen further grouped uadcr three different heads; namely (a) useful work, (b) productive work, and (c) all work. The seven broad categories are as follows :

A_1 : Care of small children

A_2 : Household maintenance activities, namely food preparation and cleaning, carrying water, drying paddy and other crops, and other household maintenance activities.

A_3 : Collection of firewood and such activities as making dung cakes for fuel, etc.

Categories A_1 A_2 and A_3 have been grouped as 'useful work'.

B : Work outside agriculture such as construction work, repairing one's own home and tools or implements, handicraft, fishing, petty trad» ing such as operating a small shop.

C : Animal care and feeding, cutting fodder, collecting food for chickens, ducks and cattle, and herding and bathing of animals, etc.

D ', Work in the field which includes preparation of fields (for crops) from cleaning land through harvest, all other associated activities such as ploughing, weeding, irrigation, etc.

E : Work outside home but not directly productive such as purchase of inputs and other essentials, marketing of products; to take food or message to the field and other outside activities.

Categories *B, C, D* and *E* above are grouped as 'productive work'.

'All work' includes time spent on either 'useful work' or 'productive work'.

We have defined 'work' in such a way that time spent on any activity is included. Most of the activities performed by women in rural Bangladesh such as threshing, drying, husking, winnowing and storing of paddy; looking after seed and rice stocks; growing fruits and vegetables; plastering mud-walls, floors, cooking stoves and yards; sewing clothes, quilts *(kantha),* knitting fishing nets; cooking, food preparation and cleaning—all these activities involve long periods of time. Although these tasks in themselves may not be directly productive, they are all necessary in the sense that they must be performed if the household in question is to function and continue its existence. But the contribution of females to the subsistence needs of the household goes unnoticed in the conventional definition of labour force participation, though these activities relate directly or indirectly to the well-being of a household. These definitions have tended to focus on participation in commodity production —that is in the production of exchange values rather than use values. Ultimately, they are intended to measurse the degree of direct involvement in a given process of growth and accumulation. The argument presented here is that participation in the labour force should include use value production as well.

'Work' cannot be realistically defined without reference to a particular society and in the context of rural Bangladesh 'work' or labour force participation should be defined in a broader sense to include both 'useful' and 'productive' works. Unless it is defined, the contribution of women and children in agrarian societies will be unreported or underreported (see Khuda 1983).

One major weakness of time use data arises from the fact that an individual may perform more than one activity simultaneously during a given time unit. To deal with this type of situation, the general practice has been to take into consideration only one activity, usually the main or primary activity and ignore secondary activity during a given time unit. If both the activities performed by an individual seemed to be important, assessment was made by consulting the person concerned on the degree of importance he or she attached to the tasks carried out simultaneously, as well as our own judgement on the importance of such activities. Let us take the case of a child who was tending animals and at the same time looking after its younger sibling. Animal care was treated as the primary activity and child care as the secondary activity and we allocated time between these two activities in the rario 2 : 1 . Although some element of arbitrariness was involved in this categorisation, there was no other satisfactory way of deciding on this issue. The elimination of secondary or accompanying activities may distort the account of what an individual did during a given time unit but *so* long as activities are grouped under broad heads, average time spent under any 'grouping' is unlikely to be affected in a significant way. Again, the number of such cases between the two major heads 'useful' and 'productive' was not large enough to have a sizeable impact on our results.

The following section gives an account of time spent between useful and

productive works and presents a sum-total of hours spent on all works. Besides, it also examines division of labour by age and sex. First, we shall begin by labour force participation of males and females during peak and slack periods.[3]

Labour Force Participation

Table la and Ib show labour force particiption rates by age and sex separately for agricultural peak (busy) and slack periods. The crude labour force participation rate in the age group 5-6 was about 43 per cenr foi boys and 44 per cent for girls during the peak of agricultural activities as against 43 per cent and 53 per cent for boys and girls respectively, during the slack period. Among the more interesting comparisons in this study are those between 'males' and

TABLE la— LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATES BY AGE AND SEX : PEAK PERIOD

Age group	*Males*		*Females*	
	Total persons	*Labour force participation rate* (%)	*Total persons*	*Labour force participation rate* (%)
5-6	30	43.3	18	44.4
7-9	54	59.3	64	70.3
(5-9) (Sub-total)	84	53.6	82	64.6
10-14	111	73.0	114	85.1
15-19	83	81.9	68	85.3
20-24	47	87.2	48	91.7
25-34	89	94.4	99	97.0
35-49	114	93.9	112	97.3
50-59	50	94.0	42	85.7
60 +	50	86.0	32	84.4
All	628	82.2	597	87.1

3. The 'time use' data from the RSP analysed in our study refer to 228 and 200 households for the peak and slack periods, respectively. These households belonged to different landholding and occupation groups and each included at least one and usually more chi.dren between ages 5-14 years.

females' labour force behaviour : female participation rate was considerably higher and the male rate slightly lower in the study area. Lower male participation during early years may be partly explained by the fact that a higher proportion of boys than girls were attending schools in the study area.

TABLE Ib—LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RA1ES BY AGE AND SEX : SLACK PERIOD

Age Group	*Males*		*Females*	
	Total persons	*Labour force participation rate* (%)	*Total persons*	*Labour force participation rate* (%)
5-6	28	42.9	17	52.9
7-9	54	61.1	56	76.8
(5-9) (Sub-total)	82	54.9	73	71.2
10-14	108	79.6	90	92.2
15-19	66	86.4	54	96.3
20-24	38	92.1	40	97.5
25-34	67	91.0	91	98.9
35-49	93	94.6	101	98.1
50-59	45	93,3	32	90.6
60 +	49	81.6	30	86.7
All	548	82.8	511	92.0

It is also cleat from the tables that slack period seems to be a period of more participation and work load for women and female children. This may be explained by the fact that for females who mostly participate in household maintenance tasks and 'inside work', there is less scope of having a slack period. Whatever the season, they have to perform the routine household and related works almost every day throughout the year. In our case, the slack period was characterised by post-harvest operations which included drying, dehusking and storing and processing of paddy and rice, plus the normal household activities including cooking and cleaning. Thus, women in Bangladesh represent a category of persons for whom there is no scope for having a slack period. Irrespective of peak or slack periods, unremitted and invisible hard work has become their life function in rural Bangladesh.

Tables 2a and 2b show that under the broadest definition of hours of work

TABLE 2a-AVERAGE HOURS OF WORK PER PFRSON PER DAY BY AGE, SEX AND CATEGORY OF WORK: PEAK PERIOD

Age group	*Males*			*Females*		
	Useful work	*Productive work*	*All work*	*Useful work*	*Productive work*	*All work*
5-6	1.5	4.35	3.69	2.50	2.10	2.93
	(3)	(10)	(13)	(6)	(4)	(8)
7-9	2.37	5.30	5.36	3.44	2.39	3.94
	(12)	(27)	(32)	(39)	(18)	(45)
(5-9)	2.20	5.04	4.88	3.32	2.35	3.79
(Sub-total)	(15)	(37)	(45)	(45)	(22)	(53)
10-14	2.81	6.15	6.43	4.60	3.74	5.68
	(17)	(77)	(81)	(90)	(37)	(97)
15-19	2.75	8.01	8.66	6.74	2.58	7.48
	(16)	(68)	(68)	(56)	(22)	(58)
20-24	3.39	9.65	10.09	7.90	3.87	9.91
	(11)	(39)	(41)	(41)	(29)	(44)
25-34	2.41	9.31	9.66	8.40	2.35	9.43
	(16)	(83)	(84)	(94)	(49)	(96)
35-49	5.90	9.82	10.22	8.34	2,40	9.74
	(24)	(97)	(107)	(108)	(67)	(109)
50-59	4.03	8.58	8.36	5.33	2.61	6.49
	(8)	(42)	(47)	(34)	(20)	(36)
60+	3.90	7.34	7.57	5.41	455	5.69
	(12)	(38)	(43)	(20)	(10)	(27)
(20-59)	4.23	9.43	9.72	7.93	2.67	9.25
(Sub-total)	(59)	(261)	(279)	(277)	(165)	(285)
All	3.54	8.09	8.36	6.55	2.82	7.54
	(119)	(481)	(516)	(488)	(256)	(520)

Note : Figures in parentheses indicate numbers. The average for 'all work" may not be equal to the sum total of the averages for useful and productive work. Because, on the same day some persons may work for only useful or productive category while others may work for both the useful and productivecategories.

TABLE 2b—AVERAGE HOURS OF WORK PER PERSON PER DAY BY AGE, SEX AND CATEGORY OP WORK : SLACK PERIOD

Age group	*Males*			*Females*		
	Useful work	*Productive work*	*All work*	*Useful work*	*Productive work*	*All work*
5-6	2.14	3.00	2.50	3.61	0.75	3.06
	(7)	(5)	(12)	(7)	(3)	*(9)*
7-9	2.84	3.57	4.02	3.83	2.03	4.50
	(14)	(26)	(33)	(42)	(16)	(43)
(5-9)	2.61	3.48	3.61	3.80	1.83	4.25
(Sub- total)	(24)	(31)	(45)	(49)	(19)	(52)
10-14	3.44	4.90	5.33	4.88	2.90	.5.87
	(25)	(76)	(86)	(79)	(35)	(83)
15-19	2.00	7.43	7.55	7.42	3.18	8.42
	(7)	(56)	(57)	(50)	(21)	(52)
20-24	4.45	7.61	8.24	7.53	2.91	8.71
	(5)	(35)	(35)	(37)	(21)	(39)
25-34	2.69	6.87	7.28	9.17	2.72	10.16
	(17)	(58)	(61)	(89)	(36)	(90)
35-49	3.40	7.90	8.33	7.87	2.67	S.87
	(25)	(982)	(88)	(99)	(37)	(99)
50-59	3.96	7.51	7.39	6.76	2.80	7.22
	(12)	(35)	(42)	(26)	(13)	(29)
60+	2.19	6.55	6.72	6.51	2.75	7.06
	(12)	(37)	(40)	(24)	(10)	(26)
(20-59)	3.40	7.50	7.86	8.16	2.72	9.11
(Sub-total)	(59)	(210)	(226)	(251)	(107)	(257)
All	3.14	6.62	682	6.95	2.72	7.81
	(117)	(410)	(454)	(453)	(192)	(470)

Note : Figures in parentheses indicate numbers. The average for 'all work' may not be equal to the sum total of the average for useful and productive work. Because, on the same day some person may work for only useful or productive category while others may work for both the useful and productive categories.

(useful plus productive) girls and women do more work than boys and men during the slack period while the reverse is true for the peak period. It is also clear from the tables that while boys and men work longer hours in productive activities; girls and women spend substantially more time on useful activities thar their male counterparts.

Division of Labour

The demand for male and female workers depends to a large extent on the culturally prescribed division of labour along sexual lines. The roots of this sex stereotyping lie in patriarchy.[4] Women's domestic work and childbearing and rearing chores are the characteristic features of patriarchy in Bangladesh.

Generally, there are certain types of activities specified for men only while there are others specified for women only. In rural Bangladesh, the division lies ia the fact that while men and boys work in the farm and undertake the outside stages of grain production as well as off-farm activities required to be carried out away from home, women generally work inside the homestead *(bari)* or within the extended, secluded precincts of home. A voluminous research has illuminated the major aspects of this division of labour in the concrete contexts of production and processing of rice, the main food crop in Bangladesh.[5]

Tables 2a and 2b give the average number of hours worked per day by age and sex separately for useful, productive and all work. It is evident from the tables that for each age group, the average hours spent in all work during peak period is higher for males than females while the reverse is true for the slack period where barring one or two age groups, the average hours worked is higher for females than males. But when useful and productive works are considered separately, it is clear that males and boys spend most of their time in productive activities while females and girls spend their time mostly on useful and household maintenance activities. This is true for both the peak and the slack periods.

The sex differential in time input between useful and productive activities can also be found at young ages. For example, during the peak period, male children in the age group 5-9 spsnt an average of about five hours on productive activities compared to two and a half hours by females of the sa me age group; with respect to useful work the corresponding figures were 2.2 hours for boys and 3.3 hours for girls.

Another interesting finding of the tables is that even during the slack period,

4. Patriarchy may be defined as a set of political relations that deliberately d;fine women's biology in ways which manipulate women's childbearing capacity and transform this capacity into their life functions. See, for example, Atkinson (1974 : 6).

5. See, for example, Greeley 1982; USAID 1983; World Bank 1983.

adult women's (between 20-59 years) time on productive work remained constant at about two and a half hours per day but their time spent on useful work increased from 7.9 hours to 8.2 hours. By contrast, adult men's useful work decreased by three-fourths of an hour while their time spent on productive decreased by about two hours.

Possible causes of intensification of female domestic work during the slack period are: more time spent on post-harvest operations including parboiling, drying, dehusking and storing of paddy and rice, plus normal household maintenance activities. Similarly, the reasons for intensification of male activities during the peak period may be explained by the fact that during busy season there is more time pressure in the field: soil preparation, planting and harvesting. This increased time pressure may account for increased male participation during the busy season.

In Tables 3a and 3b we have measured work inputs in different activities by

TABLE 3a-PARTICIPATION RATES (%) AND AVERAGE HOURS PER DAY BY AGE, SEX AND TYPE OF ACTIVITY : PEAK PERIOD

Activity/Age	*Males*						
	5-6	*7-9*	*(5-9)*	*10-14*	*15-19*	*20-59*	60+
A_1	0	1.3	1.3	2.8	1.3	3.0	2.5
		(9)	(7)	(4)	(3)	(5)	(2)
A_2	1.5	2.2	2.1	2.6	2.7	3.6	3.7
	(23)	(3D	(29)	(19)	(22)	(20)	(21)
A_3	0	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.5	—	—
		(6)	(4)	(2)	(1)		
Useful work	1.5	24	2.2	2.8	2.8	4.2	3.9
(Sub-toial)	(23)	(38)	(33)	(21)	(24)	(21)	(28)
B	3.0	3.8	3.4	2.4	5.8	6.2	4.7
	(15)	(6)	(9)	(7)	(22)	(29)	(16)
C	3.3	3.8	3.7	3.6	2.3	1.8	1.7
	(23)	(53)	(44)	(54)	(40)	(36)	(28)
D	6.3	4.4	4.7	6.9	7.2	7.7	66
	(15)	(31)	(27)	(37)	(53)	(47)	(40)
E	3.0	3.4	3.3	5.2	4.5	6.4	5.7
	(38)	(25)	(29)	(22)	(44)	(42)	(47)
Productive work (Sub-total)	4.4 (77)	5.3 (84)	5.0 (82)	6.2 (95)	8.0 (100)	9.4 (94)	7.3 (88
Total working persons	13	32	45	81	68	279	43

(Table 3a *eontd. on page* 255)

Table 3 a *(contd.from page* 254)

Activity/Age	*Females*						
	5-6	*7-9*	5-9	*10-14*	*15-19*	*20-59*	*60 +*
A_1	2.8 (38)	2.0 (56)	2.1 (53)	2.9 (26)	2.5 (40)	2.2 (44)	(37)
A_2	1.3 (50)	2.5 (71)	2.5 (68)	4.2 (77)	5.6 (97)	6.8 (94)	<t.7 ((.3)
A_3	1.5 (13)	1.5 (2)	1.5 (4)	3.6 (8)	2.5 (5)	2.9 (11)	.1.5 (4)
Useful work (Sub-total)	2.5 (75)	3.4 (87)	3.3 (85)	4.6 (93)	6.7 (97)	7.9 (97)	5.4 (74)
B	2.5 (25)	1.4 (9)	1.8 (11)	4.2 (7)	3.5 (12)	3.9 (16)	4.3 (22)
C	1.7 (25)	2.5 (31)	2.4 (930)	3.1 (25)	1.5 (26)	1.4 (42)	1.4 (33)
D	—	2.5 (2)	2.5 (2)	3.4 (5)	4.8 (3)	4.0 (5)	3.9 (7)
E	—	—	—	4.4 (4)	—	3.0 (4)	3,5 (4)
Productive work (Sub-total)	2.1 (50)	2.4 (40)	2.4 (42)	3.7 (38)	2.6 (38)	2.7 (58)	4.6 (37)
Total working persons	8	45	53	97	58	285	*27*

Note : Figures in parentheses indicate percentages. Percentages may exceed 100 because an individual may work for more than one activity on the same day.

age and sex. It is evident from Tables 2 and 3 that there exists not only a sexual division of labour but also a division of labour by age. For the vury young (i.e. children aged 5-9), children of both sexes participate in useful activities and to a lesser extent in productive activities. The very young and the old (above age 60) generally carry out activities which are light and hss skilful. But as children reach the age bracket 10-14, sexual division of labour becomes clear; while male children generally work longer hours in productive activities, female children spend most of their time on useful activities. The picture becomes clearer from Table 3.

As can be seen from the table, amongst the very young there is little division by sex and work is fairly evenly divided between housework and carrying things or messages outside the house. Children 5-6 year old spend an average of two to three hours per day in domestic chores and animal care. Young children of both sexes spend more time on the average than adults in childcare and other light activities freeing adult members of the family for more productive labour. But by age 9, there is a clear-cut sexual division of labour; male children spend almost two-thirds of their time on productive work while

TABLE 3B-PARTICIPATION RATES (%) AND AVERAGE HOURS WORKED PER DAY BY AGE, SEX AND TYPE OF ACTIVITY : SLACK PERIOD

Activity/Age	*Males*						
	5-6	*7-9*	*(5-9)*	*10-14*	*15-19*	*20-59*	*60 +*
A_1	2.0 (33)	20 (6)	2.0 (13)	1.6 (5)	—	1.8 (5)	1.8 (10)
A_2	1.5 (8)	2.6 (36)	2.6 (29)	3.5 (24)	2.0 (12)	3.0 (25)	1.9 (23)
A_3	2.8 (17)	2.5 (6)	2.5 (9)	3.1 (2)	—	—	1.5 (3)
Useful work (Sub-total)	2.1 (58)	2.9 (42)	2,8 (47)	3.4 (29)	2.0 (12)	3.4 (26)	2.2 (30)
B	2.5 (8)	2.7 (12)	2.6 (11)	3.0 (16)	5.3 (18)	5.7 (23)	5.1 (20)
C	1.7 (17)	2.2 (55)	2.2 (44)	2.2 (47)	1.9 (44)	1.5 (33)	1.8 (35)
D	2.3 (33)	3.2 (33)	2.9 (33)	4.9 (49)	6.5 (54)	6.5 (54)	6.2 (43)
E	—	2.5 (9)	2.5 (7)	3.1 (14)	6.3 (32)	4.8 (35)	5.5 (33)
Productive work (Sub-total)	3.0 (42)	3.6 (79)	3.5 (69)	4.9 (88)	7.4 (98)	7.5 (93)	6.5 (93)
Total working persons	12	33	45	86	57	226	40

Table 3b *(contd. on page* 257)

Table 3b *(contd. from page* 256)

Activity/Age	*Females*						
	5-6	7-9	(5-9)	10-14	15-19	20-59	60 +
A1	3.7 (44)	3.1 (53)	3.2 (52)	2.8 (30)	3.3 (38)	2.2 (43)	4.0 (27)
A2	2.6 (44)	2.5 (77)	2.5 (71)	3.9 (95)	6.0 (96)	7.0 (96)	5.8 (81)
A3	_	14 (14)	1.4 (12)	4.8 (4)	1.8 (8)	4.8 (5)	1.9 (12)
Useful work (Sub-total)	3.6 (78)	3.8 (98)	4.9 (94)	7.4 (95)	8.2 (96)	6.5 (98)	(92)
B	—	1.3 (12)	1.3 (10)	3.4 (11)	3.8 (27)	4.5 (13)	6.2 02)
C	—	1.4 (26)	1.4 (21)	1.2 (30)	1.1 (23)	1.2 (33)	1.3 (2.7)
D	—	3.5 (')	3.5 (6)	6.4 (6)	—	5.7 (2)	—
E	0.8 (33)	—	0.8 (6)	2.0 (6)	0.8 (2)	0.9 (2)	—
Productive work (Sab-total)	0.8 (33)	2.0 (37)	1.8 (37)	2.9 (42)	3.2 (40)	2.7 (42)	2.8 (38)
Total working persons	9	43	52	83	52	257	26

Note: Figures ia parentheses indicate percentages. Percentages may (add to) exceed 100 because an individual may work for more than one activity on the same day.

female children spend precisely that much time on useful work (including subsistence production). Thus it is clear that by their early teens there is a clear-cut sexual division of labour between male and female children in rural Bangladesh.

Work Inputs of Children Versus Adults

Table 4 presents the work inputs of male and female children of different age groups as percentages of 'adult males' (between 20-59 years of age) work

TABLE 4-WORK INPUTS OF MALE AND FEMALE CHILDREN BV AGE, EXPRESSED AS PERCENTAGES OF THE AVERAGE WORK-INPUTS OF MALE ADULTS (BETWEEN 20-59 YEARS OF AGE)

	5-6 years	*7-9 years*	*(5-9) years*	*10-14 years*	*15-19 years*
Peak Period : Productive Work (%)					
Boys	*46*	56	53	*65*	85
Girls	22	25	25	40	27
Peak Period :	All Work (%)				
Boyt	38	55	50	66	89
Girls	30	41	39	58	77
Slack Period : Productive Work (%)					
Boys	40	48	46	65	99
Girls	10	27	24	39	42
Slack Period : All Work (%)					
Boys	32	51	49	68	96
Girls	39	57	54	75	107

inputs. It can be seen from the table that the average input of boys 5-9 years old for both the peak and slack periods was about one half that of male adults (20-59 years); the average input rose steadily with increase in age and the work input of 15-19-year-old boys was almost the same as that of male adults. By contrast, the contribution of girls in terms of productive activities was substantially lower than that of adult males; girls' average input in the age group 5-9 was only one-fourth that of adult males which increased to 40 per cent at ages 10-14 and then declined to 27 per cent for the age group 15-19. In' all work', the average work input of male children in the age group 5-9 was 50 per cent that of male adults which increased to 89 per cent for boys 15-19 years old; the corresponding figures for girls were 39 per cent and 77 per cent for age groups 5-9 and 15-19 respectively. The average inputs of girls 15-19 years old, however, exceeded that of male adults during the slack period.

The findings of Tables 2 to 4 suggest that the tasks performed by children generally take long hours. A cursory look at the types of activities performed by young children may lead one to undervalue their productivity. Although

these tasks in themselves may not be directly productive in the sense of generating income, they are extremely useful and necessary for the household and in most cases young children by participating in these activities free older members of the household to take part in more productive activities. These tasks though often not very visible and though they involve less skill or physical effort, can be very time consuming.

From Table 3 it is seen that tending animals is an activity in which children of both sexes are engaged more than in any other single category of activity and also more than the adults. Table 5 presents the relevant tabulations of children's work input in 'animal care' as percentages of adult males' (20-59 years old) work input in this activity.

It is clear from Table 5 that in Bangladesh, care of the domestic animals is mainly a child's work. For children in the age group 7-14, the average input of boys in 'animal care' was more than double that of adult males during the peak period which dropped to less than 150 per cent during the slack period. The contribution of girls in animal care, although considerable, was substantially lower than that of boys at each age group for both the peak and the slack periods. The higher participation of children in animal care suggests that the presence of children, especially males, in the household enables the elder males to invest more time on agricultural works or other directly productive activities.

TABLE 5—WORK INPUTS OF MALE AND FEMALE CHILDREN IN 'ANIMAL CARE', EXPRESSED AS PERCENTAGE OF THE AVERAGE WORK INPUTS OF ADULT MALES (20-59 YEARS) IN THIS ACTIVITY

	5-6 *years*	7-9 *years*	(5-9) *years*	*10-14 years*	15-19 years
Peak Period (%)					
Boys	183	211	207	200	128
Girls	94	139	133	172	83
Slack Period (%)					
Boys	113	147	140	147	127
Girls	0	93	93	80	73

The use of domesticated animals in farming systems appears to have important consequences for the sexual division of labour. Boserup (1965) suggested that the care of the domesticated animals accounts for much of their increased

labour inputs to agriculture. Animal care tasks commonly done by male children include herding and bathing of animals and cutting fodder; while those performed by girls and women include gathering dung for fuel or building materials, bring water for animals, dairy production and caring for infant animals.

Our findings are consistent with those of Nag *etal.* (1978:293-306). In Java (as reported by Nag *et al.)* where the total time spent on domesticated animals is about 1.5 hours per person per day, more than 80 per cent of the animal care is done by males. In the Nepalese sample, where the time spent on domesticated animals is about 3.5 hours per person per day, males do only half of the care of domesticated animals. Much of the difference in animal care time between the two samples is accounted for by the dramatically increased input from older girls and women in the case of the Nepalese sample.

Table 6 lists the activities generally performed by children and according to the age at which they begin to assume each task. The most that can be said

TABLE 6-LIST OF ACTIVITIES PERFORMED BY AGE AND SEX OF CHILDREN

Age group	*Sex*	*Activity**
5-6	Both Sexes	Carrying water and food to the field, short errands; collecting dung, dried grass of fierewood for fuel, watching younger siblings (in proximity of parents), guarding food being dried.
7-9	Males	Herding cattle, cutting fodder, cleaning field with some elder males, carrying food and water to the field and taking care of younger siblings.
	Females	Watching younger siblings, cleaning, sweeping and other household maintenance activities, carrying water, helping elder females in food preparation and washing.
10-14	Males	Herding and bathing of animals, cutting fodder, selling and purchasing in market, full agricultural activities like ploughing, harvesting.
	Females	Cooking and food preparation, washing clothes, food processing (drying, husking), preparing earth ovens, plastering mud walls, floor and the yard.

*An older child usually performs not only the activities in his or her age group but also many of the simpler tasks.

from the table is that children in rural Bangladesh participate in different activities when they are very young. A child who is 5 or 6 years old may assume responsibility not only for himself, but also for a younger sibling Children aged 7 years or older are often given full responsibility for younger children who are no longer nursing. By age 7-9, children of both sexes involve long periods of time and participate much more frequently in various tasks Male children spend most of their time on herding cattle, cutting fodder and help elder males in the field, while female children mostly spend their time on cleaning, sweeping, washing; other household maintenance activities and taking care of domestic animals (chickens, ducks, goats, etc.) For the very young, there is no rigid sexual division of labour but with increase in age division of labour becomes more visible.

By age 10, division of labour along sexual lines becomes much more pronounced. While male children of 10 years and above assume responsibility of tasks outside the homestead (field preparation, ploughing, planting, irrigation, weeding, harvesting, fishing, trading or other forms of market work), girls aged 10 years and older specialise in tasks that keep them close to the homestead (household maintenance, food preparation, processing of paddy and rice, washing, carrying water and animal husbandry).

Tht Evidence

There have been a few studies in Bangladesh which show the nature and extent of children's participation in the household labour force and paren tal dependence on children. The most persuasive evidence in this regard comes from the study done by Cain (1977 : 201-27). He showed that high fertilily, particularly having more sons is rational. Presenting data from a 'typic.il' agricultural village in Bangladesh, Cain showed that male children become net producers by age 12, compensate for their total consumption by age 15 and additionally compensate for a sister's total consumption by age 22, With the same set of data he further claimed that fathers benefit from many childrsn because children, especially sons, contribute to household production and alleviate the substantial economic risks confronting the households. Surviving sons are necessary to inherit land and to maintain control of land in time of crisis. Cain also showed that large land-owning families receive more benefits from their sons because the parental households control the son's contributions for a longer period of time.

Further evidence of parental dependency on the productive utility of children and the need for old age support are provided by Khuda (1977) and Radman (1978). From an intensive study of a village in Bangladesh, Khuda reported that productivity of both boys and girls at ages 10-12 are almost equal ito that of adults. Analysing data from the CRL (ICDDR, B) study area in Matlab, Rahman *(ibid.* : 10-11) reported that children in Matlab begin their

economically useful lives as early as by age 6. About 29 per cent of boys and 78 per cent of girls by age 8, over 60 per cent of boys and 93 per cent of girls by age 10 and almost every boy and every girl by age 12 enter the household labour force.

Rahman presented *(ibid. :* 18) further evidence that 96 per cent of the women expected financial help from their grown up children. In about 94 per cent of the cases, the grown up children engaged in gainful employment have been regularly or occasionally helping their parents financially. Help from children is the major means of support for as many as 95 per cent of the women : this includes 74 per cent of the women for whom help from children is the only means of their support. Again, 96 per cent of the women expect to live with their children even after their children's marriage, and of these as many as 95 per cent wish to spend their entire lives with children.

Cain also found rigid division of labour between the sexes in. his study village. According to Cain, the high degree of sex-role specialization is rooted in and reflects the Muslim practice *of purdah,* the seclusion of women, which is an integral part of Bangladeshi culture. Cain (1977 : 201-27) maintains that since most productive activity takes place away from the homestead, a major consequence of the segregation of work roles by sex is that in a normal household men are the primary producers of income. He concluded that male children, in particular, may represent a means of supplementing income and accumulating economic wealth within their parents' lifetime.

Analysing data from the same village Cain also showed that not only number of living sons, but also timing of male births may be a significant factor in the economic welfare of the household. He concluded, 'The earlier in the household life cycle that sons are produced, the more that are produced, and the more that survive, the greater is the probability that downward mobility can be prevented during periods of crisis' (Cain 1978 : 427).

Other studies in Bangladesh have also found substantial differences between male and female children in terms of their labour force participation. In fact, a sharp sexual cleavage as between the work deemed appropriate for men as distinct from women has already been documented by Farouk and Ali (1975), Cain (1977), Jahan (1975), Greely (1982) and Khuda (1982, 1983). We only add to this list of sources the name of Rural Studies Project which confirms the by now conventional pattern. Thus, our results also confirm that boys' contributions in terms of productive activity usually exceed girls' contributions to their families and by substantial amounts. On the basis of our data we can argue that having more sons contributes to the 'economic success' of the household. The time use data attest to the considerable amounts of work done by both male and female children; when further broken down by 'productive' and 'useful' category it is evident that households with a larger number of male children are more likely to prosper economically compared to those with a larger number of female children (and with fewer sons). Studies done

in other countries also show the importance of children in the household labour force as will be clear from the following.

By far the most frequently studied value of children is their economic utility. In contemporary peasant societies, it has been contended though Mueller disputes it—that children are of net economic benefit to their parents.[6] Expanding on this view, in a series of thought-provoking articles, Caldwell has advanced and examined the 'Wealth flow theory of fertility transition' which stresses the centrality of the transformation in the nature of the family as an economic unit for an understanding of the rational for the shift from high to low fertility.[7] According to Caldwell, there are only two types of fertility regime : pre-transition where children are of net benefit to their parents and post-transition where children are net cost. The 'great divide' between those two regimes is marked by the reversal in the 'intergenerational wealth flows'. Before the transition, the net flow, counting not only money but also goods and services as well as the benefits due to the extra political power exerted by a man with many children (particularly sons) is towards the parents; after the transition, it is towards the children. The main cause, Caldwell identified for this reversal is a change in the family structure, when there is a shift in emphasis from family of orientation toward the family of procreation.

Elaborating on Caldwell's argument, Smith (1981 : 619) argues that in traditional peasant economies familial modes of production are characterised by relations of production which endow the powerful or the decision makers with material advantage (the net flow of resources within the kin group from young to old) and high fertility is advantageous to the senior members of the group. The destruction of the family mode of production and its replacement by capitalist relations of production provides the conditions under which the wealth flows no longer moves from young to old and children are no longer seen by parental generations as assets to be maximised.

Employing data from a range of sources Eva Mueller (1976) concluded that children have negative economic value in peasant society. Up to the time whc.n they become parents themselves, children consume more than they produce and

6. See, for example, Nag *et al.* (1978); White (1975).

7. In the context of fertility, the direction of the 'Wealth flow* *it* of utmost importance. According to Caldwell; the distinctive feature of agriculture societies is that parental obligation towards their children is viewed as far less important than the obligation of child:en to their parents. The social and institutional arrangements favour older generation to control younger generation including their labour capacity. As a result of these institutional arrangements, the net flow of wealth is from younger to older generations. When attitude towards children change, when there is a concentration of concern and expenditure *an* children as distinguished from the expectation of benefit and utility from children, family size is reduced as large number of children become a burden instead of an asset. See, ior example, Caldwell (1977,1978, 1982).

children of either sex (0-14) consume more than they produce until they reach the age bracket (15-19). In the limiting case, work by children may be a substitute for work by others in the family (and not additional work). Finally, Mueller argues that 'even in the age group 65-69, over half of the countries show participation rates over 80 per cent. Older rural males continue to work in the family farm and thus may require little old age support from their children' *(ibid:* 113).

But Mueller's argument misses the main points and cannot be accepted uncritically. The argument of Mueller that unremunerated domestic labour of children is unimportant because it is replacement labour for tasks performed by their parents rather than supplementary labour, ignores the fact that replacement labour frees parents for additional works. Fo. example, a Bangladeshi peasant whose child takes over the herding does not use the resulting free time for leisure activities, but makes use of the opportunity to work in distant fields or engage in marketing. Again, in countries like Bangladesh the technology of production in agriculture remains backward which implies that the production process is characterised by numerous activities which include tasks that are simple and repetitive (from taking care of the grazing, cleaning and feeding of farm animals to the laborious tasks of weeding, sowing, harvesting etc.) The presence of children (particularly, sons in the context of countries like Bangladesh) in the household can assure a certain degree of ease in life. Children (including smallest ones) perform a variety of tasks that adults regard as tedious, time consuming and beneath their dignity. So, child work is an essential element in the household production process. In dissecting Mueller's study, Caldwell argues (1976 : 242) that 'investment in children is probably an investment in the real sense of the term'.

It is significant that Mueller and Caldwell based their arguments on their experiences of Taiwan and tropical Africa respectively. Thus, one can see the views of these two from opposite ends of the spectrum. The former relies on aggregate data from censuses and surveys and the latter depends on the perceptions of the parents themselves. Parental behaviour is obviously influenced by their perceptions of the costs and benefits of childbearing rather than by economic calculations as suggested by Mueller.

After a detailed study of an Aswan village, Ammer found that children are considered as an economic asset from the age of 5 :

> With not many expenses needed for their upbringing and with the tangible labour they undertake, the burden of rearing children is offset: for although they are consumers, they are, even more so, contributors to the family resources. Children are also a means of providing parents with leisure and prestige, and every new child provides his or her older sibling with more opportunities for respite and leisure (Ammer 1954 : 40).

In most Third World countries, rural life is an endless round of physically demanding and unending work. Rural activities are not simply cleaning, digging, planting and harvesting. More time and energy is consumed in the course of a year by carrying water and fuel for domestic use, taking products for sale in the market and bringing purchases from the market and by walking to and from the nearest road or distant fields. Children provide most of these subsistence services in a subsistence economy and make life for adults more pleasant and more gracious than it would be otherwise. Cain (1976) has shown how a man aged 50 years living alone in a Bangladesh village devotes more than nine-tenths of his working time to household activities that would normally be delegated to women and children. If children had been available at home to take care of household chores, the head of the household would have been able to cultivate his own land and participate in other productive works.

Mamdani cites the importance of children in the Punjab where he argues that in the district of Ludhiana with a tractor and all the necessary implements, it takes three people to work 50 acres of land whereas without the tractor, the same land will require at least 14 people round the year and at least 20 at sowing, (weeding and harvesting times. He concludes, 'In those periods of high employment while it isfthe family that works and saves, it is the parents who control the savings (Mamdani 1974 : 1143).

Discussion

Preference for sons and discrimination against women arises not so much out of discriminatory legislation and practices as out of the psychological and cultural climate of societies. It arises out of social attitudes, out of society's prejudices, myths and beliefs. Prejudiced judgements on women are observed everywhere in rural Bangladesh. The family is one of the most efficient agents for the transmission of sexism through the attitudes of the parents in relation to their children : girls may be required to do house-work, while boys are excused. Boys and other male members may get better food than girls and women. Many families reserve education for boys, or give better education to boys, because it is considered a waste to spend meagre resources on girls.

For more than thousand years, the traditional society in Bangladesh was strictly patriarchal, as was the Bangladesh family. It was believed that the family line is carried on solely by descendants on the male side. Only the male offspring belonged to the community. Aspects of this tradition are still being reproduced by millions of parents. Sons are favoured over daughters in the allocation of household tasks; duration of academic career; demands for remittances and distribution of family property. Parental discrimination is mimicked by community, school and work unit discrimination.

Over the centuries, the patriarchal family structure and the resulting strong preference for sons became institutionalised values. According to the custom,

a woman is to obey and depend on her father before marriage, her husband during married life, and her son in widowhood. These traditions also stress the importance of carrying on the family line through male progeny. These values provide the justification for the systematic neglect of girls and women.

Prevalence of son preference in itself does not signify more than an attitude according women a low value and considering them lesser human beings when compared to men. Sex favouritism does affect the self-esteem and self image of the less preferred female children and socializes them to be subordinate to men; but this is not all. Wherever son preference is strong, it invariably tends to be accompanied by discriminatory practices against daughters many of which have serious immediate and/or long-term consequences for their health and well-being.

All those who have gone into the detail agree that the following are the factors chiefly responsible for discrimination against women : socio-cultural attitudes and prejudices, religious influence and the exclusion of women from productive work as full and equal partners. Women were, and remain the most deprived sector of the population in Bangladesh.

Discriminatory attitudes against females vary from being implicit to those that are quite explicit. Examples of implicit discrimination can no doubt be found from all over the world. There are, however, much more explicit manifestations of sex discrimination in childhood—such as differential feeding and differential care which have serious implications for the health of girls and women.

Women in Bangladesh are largely a neglected segment of the population as will be clear from the following. Men live on the average longer than women in Bangladesh. The biases against women seem to have typically taken the form of higher rate of morbidity and mortality, more boring and repetitive work, less food and health care and less decision making power. Lastly, women generally speaking, have been excluded from the advantages of modern education. For example, female enrolment at the primary level constitutes less than 40 pet cent of the total primary enrolment. The situation with regard to higher education is more dismal : girls constitute only 25 per cent of the total enrolment at the secondary level and 10 per cent at the third or higher level. Not only a large portion of girls compared to boys are out of school but dropout (premature termination before finishing the stage) is more pronounced in the case of girls than boys.

Similar discriminatory practices are observed in the utilisation of health services. Despite nearly comparable incidence levels of field diarrhoea, male children (under 5 years) in Matlab were brought to the Mailab health facilities by their guardians more frequently than female children (see Chen *et al.* 1981). The average diarrhoeal treatment rate was 66 per cent higher for males compared to their female counterparts (in the age group 0-4 years). The findings indicate one unfortunate picture of Bangladesh families, namely that

women are put into hospitals at a more advanced stage of an ailment, giving them a lower probability of recovery or a longer period of confinement.

Thus, in the area of health and nutrition there is an accumulating body of data to support the hypothesis that women are an unhealthy and badly nourished group compared to men. The fact that there are more males than females in Bangladesh is accounted for by higher female infant and adult mortality. Female babies are 50 per cent to 100 per cent more likely to suffer from protein and nutritional deficiency than baby boys. Again, men receive an undue share of the family food, while pregnant and lactating women may not j;et sufficient amounts. In addition, the demands on constant pregnancies obviously take an immense toll on the women's health.

Shocking and undesirable as they may be, son preference and concomitant daughter neglect are responsibls for much more than the direct health consequences for females described above. They are also manifested, for example, in underinvestment in daughter's education—a factor that significani ly affects the health of future generations, since maternal education is a signficant determinant of child health. Childhood marriages, low female school enroll ment and literacy rates, and discrimination against women and girls in skill development and technical training—all manifestations of the tendency to underinvest in female children—set in motion a vicious circle of discrimina tory allocation of resources and undervaluation, and contribute to the perpetuation of the low status of women.

If getting educated consists not only in acquiring knowledge, experience, know-how, but also in choosing ones way of life, promoting values, shouldering responsibility, being self-reliant in finding one's place in society as a whole in order to play a role in it, then educating a human being means preparing him to fend for himself. Now, as far as the majority of women are concerned, one may say that they have not been educated but taught and trained from birth to view themselves in a particular light. This conditioning begins even before they emerge from the womb.

Sex-based division of labour, generally accompanied by physical segregation at the place of work, does not correspond to any technical division,' but it docs produce a massive proletarianisation of women. Rural Bangladeshi women are still confined to the house and the farmyard, Again, only the poorest and thus most despised go to work in the fields. They are prisoners in their own homes, allowed only to thresh and husk the rice, but never as in China and other East Asian countries, to share in the work of transplantation, harvesting, irrigation or field preparation.

Differential contribution of sons and daughters provide the economic basis for favouring sons over daughters, because parent's long-term well-being depends crucially on their sons. The work they do as children, the earning power they achieve as adults and the support they provide throughout parents'lives (including old age) are all important to the household. Thus,

parental desire for sons appears to be governed by the striving of families for survival under existing socio-economic settings where there is security (economic and non-economic) in numbers (particularly the number of sons).[8]

But most of these benefits escape the notice of the stereotyped views of the western social scientists whose experience of rural life is limited. These studies, generally speaking, understate the actual level of such benefits and rural parents' dependence on such benefits for social survival. This understatement takes two forms : (a) it understates the actual level of returns from sons in a peasant society : and (b) it undsrstates the relative importance of such returns, given the lack of dependable alternative sources of return to parents.

In order to understand the processes by which rural parents in Bangladesh make decisions about child bsaring, it is necessarly to understand the social goals[9] of the household. These goals cannot be adequately described by reference to the maximisation or minimisation of a single variable. Rather they involve a complex strategy of diversification both of economic activities and of social relations, Simon (1957) has introduced the concept of 'administrative man' as a contrast to 'economic man'. Administrative man is not a global optimiser but is content with adaptive behaviour within fairly narrow limits—he 'recognises that the world he perceives is a dramatically simplified model of the buzzling, blooming confusion that constitutes the real world', a simplification required by this limited computational capacity and acceptable because he believes 'that most of the facts of the real world have no great relevance to any particular situation he is facing'. In Simon's term, administrative man 'satisfied' rather than 'maximised' behaviour *(ibid, :* xxv).

8. But it is not on economic grounds alone for which sons are preferred. Processes of human reproduction cannot be adequately explained or the patterns underlying them revealed without placing them m the intricate context of processes, relations and phenomena, to which the individuals belong. To provide a composite picture of the interdependence of demographic and socio-economic variables including mode of production, power structure, factional politics, risk adjustment and kinship relations, we have prepared some 'case studies'. All the case studies are based on major happenings as they occurred to the households since their inception. Here we find a wealth of interesting hypothesis that deals explicitly with factors exogenous to the individual and the household. As revealed by our case studies, positions of power and prestige in the village are generally held by households with a large number of grown up sons. Widowed, divorced or destitute women in our sample clearly turn to their sons for help and shelter. To them sons may appear to be all that will save them from destitution after their husbands are dead or they are divorced; no matter what the economic facts may be. The various case studies provide us with convincing proof that sons are necessary to the rural households for 'social' and 'economic' survival. See Mannan (1985).

9. It is difficult to isolate the economic and political aspects from the social aspects. It is seriously misleading to view that the 'political' is non-economic and non-social and the 'economic' is non-social and non-political. Neither economic nor political aspects are non-social, both are special cases of the social. See, for example, Levy (1966).

The insecurity of the peasant economy arising out of the prevailing agricultural setting requires the peasant households to follow the strategy of r;sk reduction instead of profit maximisation. The first strategy of risk reduction is that Bangladeshi peasants give primacy to subsistence agriculture in scheduling their various productive activities. Activities outside the household are only engaged in after the labour requirements of subsistence agriculture are met. A second strategy of the peasant household is diversification of economic activities and children can have both a positive and negative impact on the diversification of the household production depending on their age and sex. A household with a large number of male children in productive age groups, even with little acess to land, can succeed economically because of the larger labour supply and greater efficiency of labour through economies of scale.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

As the twentieth century draws to a close, woman remains the last colony, the last serf, the last minor in many respects. The influence of tradition, culture and social patterns is so strong that not withstanding the progress of science, technology and law, there are social, economic and psychological obstacles that still prevent her from liberating herself entirely and perpetuate inequality in every sphere. The most important of these obstacles is the division of labour, which persists in defiance of laws and declarations of principle.

Many arguments are put forward to justify the division of labour between the sexes. Economic and technical arguments have also been put forward, alleging that women are physically too weak to perform arduous tasks, or to shoulder heavy responsibilities. Moral reasons have been invoked for keeping women at home and out of public life. Economic obstacles do not, howcvsr, suffice to explain all the differences between the sexes. Cultural obstacles sire just as important. Children, parents and educators continue to cling to an image of qualities and talents regarded as spicifically feminine which is siill dominated by the centuries-old pattern of the division of labour.

Inequalities between men and women are likely to arise in many fields, in employment, education, access to and control over material resources. Preference for sons and concomitant neglect of daughters—wherever and whenever it exists—has serious repercussions. It does not affect women alone but has a negative influence, direct or indirect, on children and other members of the family as well, and through them on society as a whole.

Oae argumsat in support of son preference is that young Bangladeshi boys provide greater transfers to parents even during their early years than do girls. The 'productive' activities of male children (apart from their social importance) may be assumed to provide a strong motivation for parents in rural Bangladesh for favouring sons over daughters.

One major cause of son preference is undoubtedly the traditional roles assigned to women. Where religious and cultural practices place women in a subordinate position to men and restrict them to the home, it follows that their functions as child bearers is enhanced, especially if they produce the more valued male offspring. Differential contribution of sons and daughters provide the economic basis for favourings sons over daughters, because parent's long-term well-being depend crucially on their sons.

A derline in the labour value of children has been hypothesised to be associated with the emergence of motivation for small families The great majority of the parents in rural areas are not covered by any social security system; they rely on their sons for economic support. Parents also view children, especially sons, as a source of insurance in times of crisis, brought on by drought, flood, illness, death of a spouse or lo^{c}s of a job.

Long-term measures to deal with the phenomenon of son preference would include enactment and implementation of legislation against discrimination on grounds of sex. The government may reduce the demand for children (and sons) by promoting social welfare, social security schemes and mutual aid societies; so that a son is no longer a *must* for security in old age. Such societies, however are not established in subsistence economies. The value of child labour declines if production is transferred from the household to market enterprises, cooperatives or other similar activities.

To weaken son preference, the State will have to pursue a programme of equal rights for women and men and to build a society where girls and boys are equally capable of providing the expected benefits to parents. Again, to reduce participation of very young children in the labour force, the government can strictly implement Child Labour Law and introduce compulsory primary education for all children. Provision of free and compulsory primary education may not be adequate to ensure girls' access to education, and suitable social support measures may have to be introduced in an attempt to maintain girls'school attendance by identifying and modifying some of the societal constraints that prevent them from completing their schooling. To remove some of the disparities, preferential educational policy should be aimed at young women and specifically at the imbalance between school enrolment rates for boys and girls. Policy of self reliance among women and the reduction in the feeling of helplessness which makes them cling to their sons, should be ensured.

All these policies are, of course, desirable in their own right but their implementation becomes even more imperative when one considers their beneficial demographic implications. Needless to say, concerted efforts to improve the overall status of women are the back drop against which all the above measures have to be implemented Improving the access of girls and women to education and training and to productive resources such as land and credit which all enhance the perceived and economic value of girls and women are

the starting points in this respect. These measures may not be effective unless the political, economic and social climate is favourable. But the little girls and women suffering today cannot afford to wait that long. Appropriate action, for the short term and medium term, has to begin now,

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