

## Sociological Insights: Rethinking Decision-making in Evolving Patriarchal Family Structures



Sanchita Agarwal<sup>1</sup>, Prof. Md. Arshad<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Post Graduate Student of Institute of Social Science, Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar University, Agra

<sup>2</sup>Prof. Of Dept. of Social Science, Institute of Social Science, Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar University, Agra

**ABSTRACT:** This research paper delves into the complex interplay between family structures, women's roles, and their agency in decision-making within patriarchal societies. This paper focus on how traditional joint families, with their entrenched gender roles and centralized authority, limit women's participation in household choices. In contrast, nuclear families offer some hope, with greater autonomy and shared decision-making processes opening doors for challenging established norms. Marital status and employment status also emerge as key factors, with unmarried women and employed women demonstrating greater flexibility and influence. Financial autonomy further nuances the picture, showcasing both collaborative approaches and conditional independence for women. Ultimately, the distribution of decision-making power reflects the uneven terrain of gender equality, highlighting the persisting influence of patriarchal structures. This paper underscores the need for dismantling these structures and fostering truly collaborative familial environments to pave the way for a more equitable future for women.

**KEYWORDS:** Family expectations, eve empowerment= contextual in nature, psychological empowerment=motivational construct, Decision making, Roles and Status and Household.

### INTRODUCTION

The traditional image of the patriarchal family – a rigid hierarchy with the male breadwinner at the helm and the female homemaker in unquestioning deference – is increasingly cracking under the pressures of modernity. Evolving family dynamics including changes in household structures, from single-parent households to dual-career partnerships. They are reshaping domestic landscapes, prompting a crucial question: how have these shifts impacted women's roles, responsibilities, and, most importantly, their power in decision-making?

This research delves into the fascinating and complex interplay between women's roles and status and their decision-making power prompted by family expectation within the household. Moving beyond simplistic narratives of "oppression" or "empowerment" to explore the nuanced ways in which diverse family dynamics influence the distribution of power and the very process of decision-making itself.

the evolving power dynamics within the very core of society by understanding how women's agency and decision-making power are shaped by the shifting sands in family dynamics, so that we can pave the way for more equitable and empowering domestic landscapes for generations to come.

Its focus is not just on where women stand in the reshuffled deck of responsibilities (domestic labour, childcare, finances), but on the very cards they're dealt – how negotiating roles, sharing burdens, and influencing decisions have been redefined by these changing household structure.

With evolution at societal level, family structures stand as dynamic reflections of broader transformations, mirroring the ebb and flow of cultural, economic, and social currents. To unravel the complexities of evolving family dynamics and their profound impact on the roles and responsibilities of women within the family unit- a comprehensive exploration has been analysed in this research-changing trends in family structures impacting women's roles and responsibilities and the dynamics of decision-making within the household. This paper is an attempt to study the evolving role of women in the changing Patriarchal family in India.

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. Agarwal Bina- "Bargaining and gender relations: Within and beyond household"

Author discusses the bargaining approach as a useful tool to understand gender differences and how they are shaped and challenged. She emphasizes that understanding family dynamics is complex but crucial. She also expands the idea of bargaining beyond just

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family interactions to include other areas like the market, community, and government. She points out that society often wrongly labels tasks based on gender; for instance, calling men's work "skilled" and women's "unskilled" even if they require the same level of skill. Additionally, the value of work can be influenced by how noticeable it is. Unfortunately, women's contributions, especially within families, are often underestimated, not just by family but also by those making policy decisions. Economic disparities, while not the sole factor, often determine who has more say or authority in defining societal roles and values.

### 2. Debnath Sisir, "Understanding family structure and Women's empowerment."

Debnath explains in the paper that the direction of the association between women's financial independence and their autonomy is ambiguous. It is difficult to establish whether greater income for women improves their autonomy, or whether greater autonomy enables them to seek employment outside the home. If greater income indeed makes women autonomous, then, in the first place, women have to be autonomous to avail of opportunities to earn greater incomes.

### 3. Kabeer Naila, "The Conditions and Consequences of Choice: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment"

Kabeer delves into the complex dynamics of household dynamics as a pivotal space for achieving gender equality. She emphasizes that within this sphere, the negotiations between men and women are intricate due to intertwined factors of power, intimacy, and identity. One of the primary challenges is measuring empowerment within households, given its elusive nature and the inherent value-laden interpretations associated with it. While the paper underscores the significance of choice in empowerment, it acknowledges the need to contextualize this notion due to its multifaceted meanings. Rather than solely focusing on individual preferences, the emphasis is on understanding the conditions and outcomes of the choices individuals make. Additionally, empowerment inherently signifies change, and any alteration in the socio-structural context can elicit varied responses. This complexity intensifies when examining intra-household relationships, as the very issues that make households crucial for gender equality—power dynamics, intimacy, and identity—also complicate the assessment and understanding of empowerment within them.

### 4. Rawat Preeti S., "Patriarchal belief, Women's Empowerment and General wellbeing."

Author distinguishes between eve empowerment and psychological empowerment. While the former (eve empowerment) is contextual in nature, the latter (psychological empowerment) is a motivational construct. If conditions favouring eve empowerment make a woman experience empowerment, then it is termed as psychological empowerment. Both these variables are linked to general well-being, which is defined as a state which allows individuals to realize their abilities, cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively and fruitfully, and make a contribution to their community.

### 5. Bhattacharyya Rittuparna, "Examining the Changing status and role of Middle-class Assamese Women: Lessons from the lives of University students"

Bhattacharyya in this thesis studied- The access to higher education for middle-class Assamese women has paved the way for new career opportunities and exposure to modern ideas. Within the neoliberal and globalized context, these women derive self-esteem and confidence from their cultural capital and class habits. Many aspire to break traditional norms, aiming for 'masculine' jobs and economic independence, signalling a shift from the traditional homemaker role. However, these aspirations often conflict with societal expectations tied to marriage and motherhood. Educated Assamese women face challenges similar to their Western counterparts in balancing career and family. Yet, the cultural intricacies of Assam, with its blend of tradition and modernity, present unique challenges. Assamese women grapple with the "double day" of paid employment and domestic duties, alongside cultural expectations of loyalty and obedience to in-laws. Despite limited support, many women still perceive their primary role as upholding cultural values and transmitting them to their children. Thus, while Assamese women pursue career aspirations and economic independence, they concurrently navigate a complex interplay of tradition and modernity in daily life.

The studies mentioned above have dealt with various aspects of gender inequality prevailing in our society, however, the changing power dynamics within the family have been ignored. This research paper is an attempt to fill the gap to look into the role of women in decision making process within the family in the context of Northern India with particular reference to Agra.

## Research Question

1. How have evolving family dynamics, including changes in household structures, influenced women's roles and status?
2. In what ways do family expectations impact women's agency and decision-making power?

## Objectives

1. To identify and investigate the changing trends in family structures (e.g., single-parent households, dual-career families, blended families) and their impact on women's roles and responsibilities within the family unit.
2. To analyse the influence of evolving family dynamics on women's participation in decision-making processes within the household.

## METHODOLOGY

The particular research has followed descriptive research design. Quantitative as well as qualitative data have been used for the purpose of the study. A mixed-methods approach incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Quantitative data

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was collected through interview schedule aimed at measuring family dynamics and their influence over decision making power and roles and responsibilities of women within household. In order to capture the fine nuances of power dynamics within family case studies have also been taken.

A total of responses 74 were gathered from middle class women. There were 50 married women and 24 unmarried women. The sample comprised of 54 women with education up to post graduation, while 14 women had graduate. Of them, 28 lived in nuclear families, while 50 lived in joint families. Nuclear family was defined as households consisting of husband and wife (with or without children). Joint family was defined as households consisting of husband, and wife living with parents-in law or uncle- or aunt-in-law along with or without children. The sample comprises of 16 women from age group 21-25 years whereas 32 women from 36-40 age group, 14 women from 26-30 and 12 women from 31-35 year.

### DATA ANALYSIS

**Table 1: This table provides a comprehensive overview of how respondents allocate their time across various daily tasks, highlighting predominant roles and responsibilities. A significant 67.56% of the respondents prioritize household responsibilities, while 16.21% dedicate their time to office work. This distribution underscores the societal expectations that often disproportionately assign responsibilities to women. Additionally, in some cases respondents' inclination towards these roles is influenced by the deeply ingrained value of filial piety**

Majority of the time spend	Frequency	Percentage
Household chores	50	67.56
Office work	12	16.21
Study	12	16.21
<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Study

**Table 2: Offers insights into women's autonomy in purchasing essential items, reflecting their decision-making prowess where 48.64% still shows taking decision on mutual consensus, hence reflecting there is narrow scope for autonomous decision making.**

Does respondent able to buy mixer grinder or mobile phone on her own	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	22	29.72
No	12	16.21
Maybe	4	5.40
Mutual Consensus	36	48.64
<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey

**Table 3: This table delves into the dynamics of decision-making within households, particularly concerning significant investments such as property acquisition. Out of the total respondents, 40.54% indicate that women are predominantly excluded from major investment decisions, suggesting a potential disparity in decision-making power or an unequal distribution of authority within households. The data underscores the need to address and re-evaluate existing household dynamics to ensure equitable participation and influence for all members.**

Decision making power within household (for ex- buying property)	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	10	13.51
No	30	40.54

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Maybe	6	8.10
Mutual consensus	28	37.83
<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey

**Table 4: Details the extent of women's participation in financial decision-making within households, highlighting their influential role. This table reflects that woman has got limited financial decision making in the household. The data clearly reflects that a large section constituting 32.4% have say in household chores and child rearing responsibilities. There are few (say one pr two) instances where there is no requirement of indulgences due to presence of single household.**

Involved in financial decision making within the household	Frequency	Percentage
Limited to household chores and childrearing	24	32.43
Yes, maybe	4	5.40
Up to some extent	30	40.54
Not, at all	14	18.91
Single household	2	2.70
<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey

**Table 5:** This table encapsulates the core reasons that propelled employed women to temporarily withdraw from their careers. It underscores the amplified dual burden after marriage (which is shown in 57.14% of cases), the burgeoning household responsibilities, and the intertwined societal expectations that often position women primarily as household caretakers. Furthermore, the table sheds light on personal convictions regarding traditional roles and age-related factors that contribute to their decision to prioritize domestic responsibilities over professional pursuits.

### 1. Family Structures & Women's Roles:

- **Joint Families:** In joint family's decision-making is often centralized, and traditional roles are reinforced plus responsibilities such as caring taking, household chores increase. Thus, creating dual burden due to expectations that the prime role and responsibility is to take care or look after the household and its members. Sometimes, this dual burden take place due to filial piety that is experienced by majority of the women, owing love towards the members to their family. This leading to dual burden of work, enforce them, to put their career, academic pursuits secondary in the list of priorities. Women in joint families also experience a higher degree of scrutiny and adherence to traditional gender roles, which restrict or limit their autonomy and decision-making power.
- **Nuclear Families:** In these settings, there's often less direct oversight or interference from extended family members. This increased privacy and autonomy can grant women more agency in decision-making, both within and outside the household. Creating more space and time to pursue personal interests, thereby initiating challenge against traditional gender roles.

### 2. Marital Status & Autonomy:

- **Married Respondents:** In many cultures, marriage is seen as a transition into adult responsibilities and roles within the family structure. Married women might face expectations related to homemaking, child-rearing, and supporting their spouse's career. Such expectations, deeply rooted in tradition, can limit their freedom to make independent decisions and shape their lives accordingly. Creating gap for more participation in the activities at societal level.
- **Unmarried Group:** Majorly the age group of 21-25 are unmarried women, who have more flexibility in terms of responsibilities and decision-making power showing they prioritize their education, career advancement, or other personal goals without the immediate responsibilities tied to marital and familial obligations, which in case of married women have seen been increased.

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### 3. Occupation & Decision-making:

- **Unemployed Women:** A large number of unemployed women, especially in contexts influenced by patriarchal norms, might reflect societal pressures that prioritize women's roles within the domestic sphere over their participation in the workforce. Traditional beliefs about a woman's primary duty as a homemaker or caregiver limit opportunities for professional growth and financial independence. This situation is also exacerbated by cultural or structural barriers that impede women's access to education, training, or employment opportunities.
- **Employed Women:** The presence of employed women, particularly in roles outside the home, indicates a departure from traditional expectations. These women are navigating the complexities of balancing professional responsibilities with household duties. Their participation in the workforce challenging societal norms, fostering discussions about gender equality, shared responsibilities within the household, and the evolving role of women in economic and political decision-making.

### 4. Reasons for Unemployment:

- **Patriarchal Control:** In societies with strong patriarchal structures, women often face barriers to entering or remaining in the workforce. These barriers can manifest in various forms: limited educational opportunities for girls, cultural norms that prioritize male employment, and discriminatory practices in hiring and promotions. Such restrictions not only curtail economic opportunities for women but also reinforce traditional gender roles, relegating them primarily to domestic responsibilities.
- **Influence of Marriage:** Marriage significantly impacts a woman's career trajectory. Societal expectations dictate that married women prioritize household duties and childrearing over professional pursuits. This expectation, coupled with potential challenges in balancing work and family responsibilities, leading many married women to leave the workforce voluntarily or due to familial pressures. The decisions influenced by marriage highlight the inherent tension between traditional familial expectations and women's individual aspirations for personal and professional growth.

### 5. Financial Autonomy:

- **Mutual Consensus:** The emphasis on mutual consensus in household financial decisions reflects a collaborative approach to managing family finances. While this approach acknowledges the perspectives and preferences of all family members, including women, it also indicates that women's financial autonomy is contingent upon the approval or agreement of other household members, particularly male members in patriarchal settings.
- **Individual Decision-making:** The instances where women can make individual purchasing decisions signify a degree of financial independence and agency. This autonomy allows women to exercise control over their finances, make choices aligned with their preferences and needs, and assert their role in household economics. However, the extent of this autonomy can be influenced by various factors, including cultural norms, economic status, and the overall power dynamics within the household.

### 6. Household Decision-making Power:

- **Limited Decision-making Power:** The reported limited decision-making power among women in household matters highlights the pervasive influence of traditional gender roles and patriarchal structures. In such settings, key decisions, ranging from financial investments to educational choices for children, are often dominated by male members, marginalizing women's voices and perspectives.
- **Decisions through Mutual Consensus:** The prevalence of decisions made through mutual consensus suggests a gradual shift towards more egalitarian familial dynamics. While this collaborative approach fosters communication and shared responsibility, it also indicates the persistence of patriarchal norms, as women's decision-making power remains conditional and subject to negotiation with other household members.

## CONCLUSION

With evolving family structures and enduring patriarchal norms, this study unravels the complex relationship between women's roles, responsibilities, and their participation in household decision-making. In traditional joint families, women often shoulder the dual burden of childcare and family duties, their voices overshadowed by the centralized decision-making and reinforced traditional roles. In contrast, nuclear families offer a glimmer of hope, granting women greater autonomy and agency in decision-making processes, both within and outside the domestic sphere, and opening doors for challenging established gender norms.

Marital status further shapes the landscape. Married women, while navigating the complexities of balancing societal expectations around homemaking and child-rearing with their own aspirations, sometimes find their decision-making power restrained. Unmarried women, particularly those in their early twenties, exhibit greater flexibility and prioritize personal goals, education, and careers, charting their own paths with relative independence.

Employment status also emerges as a significant influence. Patriarchal norms can stifle the professional aspirations of unemployed women, restricting access to financial independence and opportunities for growth. Employed women, however, stand as beacons of progress, challenging these norms through their participation in the workforce and fostering discussions about shared responsibilities



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within the household. The reasons behind unemployment, be it patriarchal control limiting educational opportunities or the societal pressure to prioritize familial duties after marriage, further highlight the persistent influence of traditional structures.

Financial autonomy, too, plays a crucial role. While mutual decision-making in household finances signifies a collaborative approach, it often masks the conditional nature of women's autonomy, especially in households where approval rests with men. Individual financial decision-making, however, empowers women with a degree of control over their finances and allows them to assert their role in household economics.

Ultimately, the distribution of decision-making power within households reflects the uneven terrain of gender equality. Limited power for women, evidenced by key decisions often being dominated by men, demonstrates the continued influence of traditional roles. While the growing prevalence of decisions made through mutual consensus suggests a gradual shift towards more egalitarian dynamics, it also underscores the need for further dismantling of patriarchal structures.

In conclusion, this study illuminates the intricate dance between evolving family structures, women's roles and responsibilities, and their decision-making power within patriarchal societies. While progress is evident in areas like greater autonomy for women in nuclear families and employed women challenging norms, the persistence of traditional expectations and conditional power dynamics highlights the ongoing struggle for true gender equality. Dismantling these patriarchal structures and fostering truly collaborative familial environments remain crucial steps towards paving the way for a more equitable future for all.

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