

Conclusion

The present study was undertaken in order to make a comprehensive sociological analysis on the status of working women in decision making process of Bengali families of Shillong. In the North Eastern Region of India, Shillong has been an important cosmopolitan town where people from different communities settled for different service and business purposes. Shillong is an important centre of education having a considerable number of schools and colleges. During British administration, Bengalis came as 'Babus' (clerical staff) in Shillong to work for the government. Since then Bengalis started living in Shillong as enterprising businessmen and government servicemen. Here it is worth mentioning that Bengali women of Shillong because of the cultural influence of other communities started living a far more advanced life in terms of their educational attainment and employment compared to their other counterparts in Bengal. They could overcome the traditional boundaries of their own society and took education for their overall development of life. As a result of this, they have started taking up jobs outside the domain of their home which further resulted in a change in the nature of their outlook. Thus in the present study, an attempt has been made to assess the status of Bengali educated working women with reference to decision making process of the family. Participation of women in family decision making process of the family

under patriarchal principles has been thought to be a positive indicator to assess and estimate the degree of social change, if any in the Bengali family.

The main assumption of this study is that in the traditional Bengali society, there was a great deal of congruence between roles performed by men and women in the family. According to the functional School the values which were the basis of division of labour, status hierarchy and differential distribution of family resources based on sex provided stability and coherence(Parsons:1972). However, women's life has changed due to their entry into educational field and job market in recent times. Women's education have immensely contributed towards a new level of consciousness and self esteem among the traditionally under privileged sections. Modern education, means of communication and egalitarian ideology have threatened the traditional summation of statuses and roles. With this point in view, the researcher thought of studying the effect of women's employment in decision making process of family.

In the **first chapter**, the researcher discussed the statement of the problem and the various literatures related to the topic under study. In this chapter, the researcher also discussed the objectives of the study that sought to examine the effect of women's education and employment on the decision making process within the family. To be able to carry out

the study, the researcher adopted structured questionnaire method and interview method. In order to collect information related to the study, field work was conducted in two phases. The first phase consisted of pilot study and the second phase of the field work was carried out for data collection by building up rapport and personal contact with the respondents.

The **second chapter** has been divided into five sections:

In the **first part of the second chapter**, the researcher discussed broadly the traditional Bengali social structure with a statement that Bengalis belong to the Indo-Aryan family, organized on the basis of two principles- the dependence of women and the segregation of the sexes. Patriarchal principles dominate the Bengali families where women play the role of subordinates and men are exclusively given power to decide the family issues as bread earners of the family. Bengalis follow the principle of caste endogamy and gotra exogamy. Marriages are mostly arranged where the caste consideration is regarded very important to settle marriage between two families.

In a patrilineal society, the rule of descent is strictly based on the male line only. Thus all children acquire membership in their father's line. The pattern of inheritance, rules of succession and residence closely follow the system of patrilineal descent. The principle of succession is primogeniture and accordingly the eldest son has the responsibility and

obligations to the family, who eventually becomes the head of the family after his death. A daughter has very little opportunity to express her opinion in the parental house for she marries and after marriage according to the patrilocal residence, she leaves the parental house. A daughter only gets temporary membership in parental household. She gets permanent membership only after marriage. Marriage and motherhood are considered essential for a Bengali woman. In a Bengali family, a woman becomes the vehicle through which the husband's son is born and a lineage is established and continued. The smooth functioning of the family broadly depends on the women who are responsible for maintaining the daily domestic routine. The women from their very childhood are taught to be mild, less tocative and patient. When a young bride enters her husband's family after marriage, her relationships with other members are governed by intricate rules of conduct. She gets a respectable position in the family only after giving birth of a son, the progenitor, who is regarded as a link in the patrilineal system. In Bengali family, monogamy is the mostly preferred type of marriage. Polygamy was also practiced in the traditional Bengali families mainly in those cases where wives were not able to give birth of sons, because the sons were considered to be the only successor of the family property and to continue the male line. However, polygamy was discouraged due to its negative connotation in the peaceful existence of

the family atmosphere. Dissolution of marriage or the practice of divorce is very rare in Bengali families.

It must be mentioned that religious practices are an important part of socialization of girls in Bengali family. Women are particularly taught to perform various *bratas* or vows to make her life purer and peaceful. The performance of *bratas* undoubtedly plays an important part in conditioning a woman to her life ideal role in society and family. Moreover, traditionally it was only during religious festivals and some special occasions when women from different families used to get the opportunity to meet and talk with the people. It was also a religious duty for a wife to offer *bhakti* (respect) to her husband not only because of the age difference but also the husband was a deity to her as Siva or Krishna.

In the **second part**, the researcher discussed about the Bengali families of Shillong, since, for the present study, Bengalis of Shillong were chosen to assess the status of Bengali women in decision making process of their family to examine the continuity and change (if any) of patriarchal principles of Bengali families. Shillong is one of the beautiful hill stations of the North Eastern Region of the country. Khasis are the original inhabitants of this place and along with Khasis, there are also Bengalis, Biharis, Nepalese, Punjabis and many others who reside together with mutual cooperation to one another. Bengalis constitute one

of the largest non-tribal groups of Shillong. Bengalis of Shillong are no doubt, influenced by different cultural practices of other communities and therefore, when we take a closer look at the history of Bengalis of Shillong, we come to know that Bengalis are far more socially and educationally advanced and have a broader outlook towards the position of women in the family. A few written documents show that when women of Bengal were living a life of seclusion, at that time Bengali women of Shillong realized the value of education and there were also few enlightened Bengali women like *Smti Hemanta Kumari Devi*, *Smti Sarada Manjari Devi*, *Smti Subarna Pravha Das* and *Smti Leela Roy* who joined hands together to eradicate the orthodox patriarchal values of Bengali families and to pave the way for women to take education and enter into employment sector for their all round development. Bengali women of Shillong could overcome the traditional boundaries of their own society and took education and some of them also joined in gainful employment to supplement the family income.

In this context, the **third part of the second chapter** provides an insight into the socio-economic background of the respondents. The women in the present study are mostly in the age group of 45-49 years (52%).

Most of the respondents are born and brought up in Shillong (69.3%) and the rest (30.7%) have migrated in the town for different

reasons. A considerably good number of the respondents said that they have migrated to Shillong because of their job and marriage. Almost all the respondents are from urban areas.

Regarding the educational background, majority of the respondents (48%) have completed the post graduate degree and it has been found that about 53.3% respondents occupation is teaching where as 46.7% are employed in different government services. Few respondents also said that teaching profession is more suitable for them since they get more time to spend with their family. On the other hand, 82% respondents' husbands are engaged in different government services, which are mostly preferred by educated males of Bengali families.

Regarding the income of the respondents, it is seen that about 78.7% respondents have monthly income more than Rs. 30,000/ and 53% respondents' husbands have monthly income more than Rs.30,000/. Regarding the educational background of the respondents' parents, it is found that comparatively more fathers of the respondents (60%) are graduates. Mothers of the respondents are just literate or less educated than the fathers. It seems more preference was given to the boy child by the parents in the first generation of education.

Regarding the occupation/profession of the parents of the respondents, almost all the mothers of the respondents (87%) are

housewives. Among the fathers of the respondents, majority of them (58%) are in government service. Comparatively more fathers of the respondents are engaged in government service.

Regarding the education of the children, it is found that 34% of the first children of the respondents are graduates, 21.28% of the second children passed HSSLC and 42.46% of their third child are at the middle school level. It is also seen that, only 5.33% children of the respondents are engaged in different government and private sector occupation.

Majority of the respondents (82.7%) joined job before their marriage and about 73.3% respondents had been working for more than 15 years (at the time of data collection).

Fulfilling one's ambition, self satisfaction, economic necessity and economic independence were the major reasons given by the respondents for taking up the job. Majority of the women respondents said that they were impelled to get into employment or professions not only by economic insufficiency, but also by other socio-psychological motivations and they also said that they would continue to work even if their economic condition improves.

Regarding the type of family, majority respondents (67%) said that they are living in nuclear families and therefore it is easy for them to carry out dual roles in a much more satisfactory way. Thus it is clear that, among the Bengalis of Shillong, Nuclear family is the dominant

type where majority of them (approx. 44%) have only four members in the family consisting of husband, wife and their two children.

In reply to the question regarding whether the respondents are living in their own houses in Shillong or not, majority of them (61.3%) replied that they are living in rented houses and those who have their own houses, majority of them also clarified that the houses are mostly either in their husbands' name or in their father-in-laws' name, as in Bengali family, male members generally inherit the family property. Majority respondents (82.7%) also said that, they have no share even in their parents' property. Those who admitted that they have share in parents' property, among them around 62% said they received landed property from their parents.

Regarding the willingness of the respondents' towards giving best education to their daughter, all most all the respondents (80.7%) said that they do not like to bring any kind of distinction between their sons' and daughters' education. The further said that they believe in gender equality and daughter also has the right to get good education for their future life.

In **part four of the second chapter**, power structure of the traditional Bengali family with reference to the position of women was discussed. It was made clear that in traditional Bengali family, the entire authority of the family rested in the hands of the eldest male member,

i.e. the '*karta*' and the '*ginni*'. The authority structure was strictly hierarchical with the *karta* and the *ginni* at the top and the youngest brothers of *karta* at the bottom of the ladder. In other words, it may be mentioned that, the power structure of the Bengali family was 'traditional' as its rules were traditionally received and was completely different from rational-legal authority. A woman's authority in the family was determined by the length of time she had spent in it and the position of her husband in relation to his brothers. As a 'mother of sons', she sometimes used to get the right to advise her husband in certain cases. However, according to the traditional patriarchal values, she had no right to take decision in family issues. All the family decisions were mostly taken by the male members of the family. Women had no right to decide on matters which were directly linked to them such as choice of marriage partner, education, family planning etc. However due to the efforts made by the social reformers in the 19th and the 20th centuries, much changes were noticed in the power structure of the Bengali family.

In **part five of the second chapter**, the decision making process of the Bengali families and the participation of Bengali women in decision making process of their family were discussed.

Regarding the ability of the respondents to participate in decision making process, all most all the respondents (84.7%) feel that they have the ability to participate in decision making process in their family

because of their education, intelligence, their capability to suggest good decisions etc.

Most of the respondents (94.7%) in the present study said that, because of their education and employment, their family members now want them to participate in decision making process, which shows that Bengali families of Shillong are becoming more liberal while giving opportunities to the female members of their family to participate in family decision making process.

About 89% respondents accepted that unlike traditional Bengali family, today, most of the families give more importance to joint decision making i.e. taking consent of each other and 53.3% respondents also admitted that, in their families, before taking a final decision, most of the time discussion take place and then the final decisions are executed.

Another crucial aspect of the study was to understand the pattern of power relations by analyzing the participation of working women in different areas of their family decision making. Thus **in the third chapter**, an attempt has been made to examine the participation of working women in some of the important familial issues such as children related issues, economic issues, family planning, buying or selling of property, visiting other relatives etc. In this regard, the perceptions of the respondents regarding the ideal role of husband and

wife were firstly analyzed. In their opinion on the ideal roles of husband and wife, most of the respondents favoured traditional role as ideal. In short, as perceived by the wife, her educational and economic status does not have much bearing on her traditional ideal of married life.

Several questions related to the effect of education and work on family decision making was raised to find out whether or not the educated working women have the same power in the decision making, as their husband in the family. In order to measure the power of the educated working women vis-à-vis their husbands, important areas of family decision making such as major expenses and purchases, buying or selling of properties, education and marriage of children, organizing festivals, vacations and outings etc. were examined.

A good number of the respondents (77.3%) said that, it was their own decision to take up the present job. A considerable number of them also said that they took the consent of their parents and their husbands. It is seen that the higher educational qualifications have prompted the women to take up some career of their own. All most all the respondents (92%) also said that they would like to continue their work to lead a comfortable life. Almost all the respondents did not face any objection from their husbands for working outside their homes. Majority of them said that their husbands respect their individuality. A considerable number of them said that additional earning is required in their family.

Most of the respondents (52%) said they themselves decide how they will utilize their income. Almost half of the respondents (46%) said that they contribute about 75%-80% of their earnings in running the house, particularly in education of children. Most of the respondents said that they jointly contribute almost equally towards their domestic expenses where a change has been noticed in Bengali families of Shillong because in traditional Bengali families, husband always had the responsibility to run the house and bear the domestic expenses.

More than half of the (72%) said that they have their individual fund from which they spend and their husband hardly interfere in it. They said that, they spend money for themselves and their children without husbands' permission.

A large majority of the respondents (82.7%) said that they have decided to give a share of their property to the daughters because daughters also have the right to inherit parent's property. 94% respondents also decided not to claim dowry during their sons' marriage because it has been declared as an illegal act.

Most of the respondents (68.7%) said that their monthly salary mostly constitute their property and major decision on buying or selling of property is mostly a joint decision of both husband and wife. In matters related to education of children, more than half of the respondents (89.3%) said that, it is a joint decision. They spend their

income for their children without husbands' consent. Infact, a large majority of respondents said that they have greater say on children's education, career and mate selection.

Regarding decision on family planning, about 82.7% respondents said that, it is a joint decision.

On issues such as family budgeting, family vacations, both husband and wife takes the joint decisions. In joint family, mother-in-law also sometime takes decision on family vacation.

Regarding decisions on buying food items and organizing religious functions, the respondents themselves decide most of the time. Thus on the basis of the available data, it has been found out that the education and earning status of women has resulted, to some extent, the power re-allocation in the husband-wife relationship. However, no definite co-relation was found between the income earned and their capability to participate in the family decision making process. But a co-relation was found between their level of education and their power to participate in different areas and spheres of family decision making process.

In the **Fourth chapter**, working women's power to influence family decision making was discussed. It was intended to find out the extent of their power to take final decision and execute these decisions in their family.

Almost half of the respondents (40%) said that, they have more influence on schooling of children and most of the time, they have the power to take final decision and execute them.

It was also found out that about 67% husbands of the respondents always welcome the participation of their wives in different areas of decision making and it was told by the respondents that their husbands always feel that their wives' participation is compulsory, particularly in those areas such as family budgeting, buying food items, education of children etc. because these are the issues mostly dealt with excellence by their wives in the family.

Regarding the influence of income on decision making power, almost all the respondents (80%) said that income have no influence on decision making power. A considerable number of respondents also admitted that while purchasing expensive items, income often influence final decision and most of the time husbands take the final decision and implement it, in other cases there is no definite co-relation between income and the decision making power of the spouses.

Most of the respondents (73.3%) have also admitted that, they to a large extent influence family planning decisions of their family.

Almost half of the respondents (48%) said that in majority cases, their decisions are implemented at the final stage. The recurring decisions taken by the respondents such as decisions related to buying

food items, family budgeting and education of children are mostly implemented by the family. It was also told by most of the respondents that so far majority decisions taken by them gave fruitful results to the family.

65.3% respondents also admitted that they often have conflict with their husbands regarding decision making on different issues of the family and most of the time, they resolve conflict through discussion and in some of the cases, it is the husband's opinion that ultimately prevail.

In regard to the statement: '*Ever thought a husband has more capabilities than his wife*', half of the respondents (67%) dis-agreed with the statement and said that both husband and wife have equal capabilities. Another statement: '*Bengali families are modern now*', most of the respondents dis-agreed with the statement and said that it was most of the time neither conservative nor modern, rather a mixture of both depending on the different issues of the family.

In third statement: '*Patriarchal principles are relaxed to a great extent in today's Bengali family*', more than half of the respondents agreed to that statement and said that today patriarchal principles have been relaxed to a great extent and a lot of changes are noticed in the behavioral aspects of the members of family in different situations.

Almost half of the respondents did not agree with the fourth statement i.e. *‘in domestic matters women should not exercise authority over men.’*

From these few statements, it is observed that respondents do recognize their capability and aware of the fact that, being educated and employed member of the family, they also must exercise certain degree of authority over decision making process of their family but, at the same time, it is also clear that, absolute authority is not desirable for smooth running of the family.

In last part of the study, the researcher mentioned few case studies in order to understand the general attitude of the respondents’ towards women’s role and also the changes that took place in the Bengali family over the years. A greater number of the respondents shared their own experiences of their family and accepted that, a lot of changes have taken place in the relational aspect of the family which definitely indicate a shift from the traditional idea of women being confined in the domain of family and where she take care of everyone and everything in the family. Case studies revealed that unlike traditional power structure of the Bengali family, today education and employment of women enabled them to acquire a respectable position in the power structure of the family and also enhanced their power of decision making in many areas of their family.

Thus we can conclude that the findings may be seen as retention of traditional family structure with an increasing shift towards modernity. There is a power re-allocation in the family among the husband and wife. It is the combination of education, occupation and income along with their parents' family background that bestowed power of decision making on women in their family. Moreover, if they are neglected and their decisions are not given importance by other family members, they often resented to it. These are some perceptible indicators of change in the authority structure of Bengali family which amply demonstrate the nature and extent of change in the working women's life in the family.

From the entire findings one important feature comes out i.e. a section of working women is found to be self-conscious, self-assertive and confident, demanding equality with men in all spheres of life, be it at home or outside world. Education, employment and interaction with people outside have opened their eyes to appreciate new vistas of life and thus, this torch bearing section of working women is just striking a new live, placing a new note for the rest of the society. But of course, they do not want to be mere imitators of men. They are trying to realize their own worth, rights and privileges, both at home and outside. Moreover, attitudinal changes are distinctly observed among the educated working women of Bengali society as seen in the present study

which was carried out in the city of Shillong. The Changing role of Bengali women in the fields of education and occupation no doubt illustrate a wide spread pattern occurring in our societies that are being exposed to modernization, urbanization and other influence.