

WOMENS' ROLE IN HOUSEHOLD DECISION MAKING IN NEWARI COMMUNITY

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Abstract

This study attempts to explore women's role in household decision making in Newari community among married women of 15-60 years of Kirtipur Municipality 5, Kathmandu district. This study has used both quantitative and qualitative data for the study purpose and also includes few case studies for the qualitative purpose. Mean age of the respondent was 38.52 (± 8.72). Total respondents of this study were 125 married Newari women. The study is based on primary data collection in terms of decision making about their marriage, selling and buying of assets, daily consumption of food, educational enrollment of kids and using family income. This study reveals that Newari married women have effective role in decision making on marriage and educational enrollment of their kids however their participation is quite low in decision making for daily consuming food and selling and buying of assets.

Key Words: Decision, enrollment, consumption, participation.

Introduction

Newar, Nepal Bhasa or **Nepami**, are the historical inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley and its surrounding areas in Nepal and the creators of its historic heritage and civilization (Singh, 2016). Newars form a linguistic and cultural community of primarily Indo-Aryan and Tibeto-Burman ethnicities following Hinduism and Buddhism with Nepal Bhasa as their common language (Levy & Robert, 1991). Newars have developed a division of labour and a sophisticated urban civilization not seen elsewhere in the Himalayan foothills. Newars have continued their age-old traditions and practices and pride themselves as the true custodians of the religion, culture and civilization of Nepal. Newars are known for their contributions to culture, art and literature, trade, agriculture and cuisine. Today, they consistently rank as the most economically, politically and socially advanced community of Nepal, according to the annual Human Development Index published by UNDP. Nepal's 2011 census ranks them as the nation's sixth-largest ethnicity/community, with 1,321,933 Newars throughout the country (CBS,2013).

Role is defined as the social expectations attached to particular status or social positions and analyses the workings of such expectations. Gender role refers to the parallel and socially unequal sexual division of labor in institutions and organization of a society. At a structural level, there are unequal division of labor between men and women in the household and community.

The society of Nepal is male dominated where female are always given a second preference. Son is respected in society while daughter is considered as trouble for household (Acharya, 1997). Most of the Nepalese women are backward because of illiteracy, sexual discrimination due to the patriarchal system of the Nepalese society where women are not treated equal rights from the womb (Mishra, 1989). The role and decision making of women differ according to caste and ethnicity. So the decision making power of women are highly restricted (Bhandari, 2013). Nepal is a country of mixed cultures where various and diverse ethnic groups have their own developed cultures, languages, traditions and religions. However, they have been living together in harmony of centuries. Newar is an ethnic group of the many ethnic groups of Nepal.

In the case of Newari community the decision making of women is related with level of education and economic dependency. Low income earning together with the absence of right to property have limited the role of decision making about the allocation of household (NHDR, 2004). Poudel (2012) mentioned that women play a significant role in the development of nation. But in recent years people have started realizing the importance of women's participation in the economic and social development. In the household level the main work of women are domestic work like the care of children, looking for family health, cooking and providing food and other household services but their role in societies are forgotten since they can also play a major role in productive activities of the family, in farming paid domestic labor services, industries and income generating activities. But when their status is considered on decision making power, it seems in only name (Poudel, 2012). The patriarchal social structure has prevented Nepalese women from enjoying status equal to that of men (Bhandary, 2013). Lack of decision making power has deprived them from their basic requirements of decent life. Though women play significant role in all societies both as social and economic aspects; they should therefore be seen as integral partners in all development efforts but they are highly dominated by men so their decision making is considered not important (Haberland et. al., 2003). The decision making power and the status of women in the developed countries is also lower in all sectors. Comparatively the role of women is way too far below than that of developed countries as they are bound by religious beliefs and social taboos. Male dominated family system provides very little scope for the female to assert their identity. They are marginalized from economic and social opportunities due to illiteracy, poverty and conservative social taboos. As a result, women have been getting the hindrances to get employed in other fields (Subedi, 2012). Self-employed have a higher probability of having some say compared at somebody else in business or field, all else equal. Women's earning like same amount or more than their husband have more probability of having some inputs in decision in comparison to those who do not earns (Acharya, 2008). The gender empowerment measure (GEM) determines whether women take an active part in economic and political life. It exposes that Nepal ranks 83rd out of 109 countries in the GEM, highlighting there are inequalities in opportunities among women in selected areas (NHDR, 2009). Women are deprived from their basic requirements of decent life due to lack of decision making power. As they play significant role in all societies both as social and economic aspects; they should therefore be seen as integral partners in all development efforts (Haberland et. al., 2003).

Nepal Participatory Action Network (NEPAN, 2001) reported that about 86% of Nepalese women are limited to reproductive roles in the society leading to their overall lack of confidence. Though women in Nepal are also engaged in economic activities but their role is feeble in decision making particularly in matters related to agriculture and financial management. Girls are sent to their in-laws' houses following marriage, money spent on their education and healthcare is ultimately viewed as a poor investment. As a result, the overall development of a daughter is accorded less priority than that of son. Similarly, Newari women also fall victim to such social and economic obligations and are excluded or discouraged from involvement in household and family decision making processes because of patriarchal values and power structure in the families. Newari women widows are not permitted to remarry, nor may they lead religious ritual or other functions. The oldest male is always the head (thakali/thakuli) of a Newari family and takes sole responsibility for decision making. However, Newari widow cannot be "thakali/thakuli nakin" (the eldest female in the Newari household). In general, Newari hold very traditional beliefs tend to be more conservative, while those with more educated and better opportunities for social participation and economic engagement tend to be more liberal.

Objectives

The overall objective of this study is to find out the role of women in household decision making in Newari community.

Specific objective is:

- i) To analyze the effect of household decision making in terms of education, occupation and caste wise.

Methodology

This study has used descriptive research design to describe the current situation of women in household decision making in newari community carried out in Kirtipur Municipality of Kathmandu. For the purpose of this study conveniently one ward of the municipality was selected which included Lacchi, Lakhu and Dathal restructuring previous ward 11 and 12 which is now ward number 5. This ward was purposively selected as the study area since majority of this place is occupied by Newari population. This study used both quantitative and qualitative methods for data collection. Similarly few in-depth interviews were carried out during this study and these in-depth interviews were selected as they have started to share their stories during the study and later separated in-depths interviews for the case study. Face to face interview method with semi structured questionnaire was used for the purpose of quantitative data collection while through case studies qualitative data were collected. Ward number 5 consist altogether 200 households which was considered as universe of the study and 125 households were chosen for the interview as it is more than 60 percent out of the total household which can represent the area properly (Census, 2011). The sample size of the study was 125 married women which were chosen single women from single household by the simple random sampling method. Pre informed verbal consent with all the participations was taken to ensure the privacy of all the participations and confidentially was maintained during the process o the study. Data was analyzed using computer software SPSS version 21. Simple descriptive tools: frequency, percentage and mean were used

for data presentation.

Results

To study about the chief importance of women's role in household decision making, Kirtipur Municipality ward no 5 is chosen as the field study because Kirtipur is old residential area mostly occupied by local Newar people. Interviews were conducted with married women based on research questions on women's decision making power in different variables such as marriage, selling and buying of assets, daily consumption food and education enrollment of kids. If women have participated in decision making by "Self" than it is considered they are independent to take decision and they are enjoying a high degree of autonomy in decision making in the family.

Table 1: Demographic and Socio-Economic Characteristics of Respondents

Background Attributes	Number	Percentage
Caste	107	85.6
Maharjan	18	14.4
Others*		
Educational Level		
Illiterate	29	23.2
Up to SLC	46	36.8
Higher Education	50	40.0
Occupation		
Student	2	1.6
Housewife	44	35.2
Business	23	18.4
Job (Government & non government)	45	36.0
Others**	11	8.8
Total	125	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2019

*Others** include Bajracharya, Shrestha, Shahi/Khadgi, Darshandhari, Dangol, Manandhar and Mali.

*Others*** include Agriculture and Vocational Income Generating Activities.

Table 1 reveals that out of 8 Newari castes in the study area it was found that the highest share was of Maharjan (85.6%) and others shared 14.4 percent including Bajracharya, Shrestha, Shahi/Khadgi, Darshandhari, Dangol, manandhar and Mali. Similarly, of the total 125 respondents Higher Education shared the highest proportion (40%) followed by Up to SLC (36.8%) and Illiterate (23.2%).

In terms of activities, job holder (government and non government) shared highest proportion (36%) and student shared the least proportion (1.6%).

Table2: Distribution of Respondent by Background Characteristics and by Decision Making

Background Attributes	Decision on marriage			Decision for Selling and Buying of Assets						Total	
	Self (%)	Parents only (%)	Parents consulting with respondent (%)	Self	Husband	Jointly	Father in law	Mother in law	Jointly with family members		
Caste											
Maharjan	49.5	21.5	29.0	.9	13.1	69.2	13.1	.9	2.8	100.0	107
Others*	44.4	11.1	44.4	5.6	16.7	55.6	11.1	5.6	5.6	100.0	18
Educational Level											
Illiterate	31.0	44.8	24.1	3.4	31.0	58.6	6.9	.0	.0	100.0	29
Up to SLC	56.5	17.4	26.1	.0	15.2	76.1	6.5	2.2	.0	100.0	46
Higher Education	52.0	8.0	40.0	2.0	2.0	64.0	22.0	2.0	8.0	100.0 100.0	50
Occupation											
Student	100.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	50.0	.0	.0	50.0	100.0	2
Housewife	40.9	34.1	25.0	2.3	25.0	56.8	9.1	4.5	2.3	100 100.0	44
Business	69.6	13.0	17.4	.0	17.4	73.9	8.7	.0	.0	100.0	23
Job (Government & non government)	46.7	8.9	44.4	2.2	2.2	71.1	20.0	.0	4.4	100.0	45
Others**	36.4	27.3	36.4	.0	9.1	81.1	9.1	.0	.0	100.0	11

Source: Field survey, 2018

Others* include Bajracharya, Shrestha, Shahi/Khadgi, Darshandhari, Dangol, Manandhar and Mali.

Others** include Agriculture and Vocational Income Generating Activities.

Of the total 125 respondents, in terms of caste, role of decision making on marriage by self is more of Maharjan (49.5%) than others (44.4%). By educational level, the decision making on marriage by self is seen nearly double of "Up to SLC"(56.5%) and "Higher Education" (52.0%) than Illiterate (31.0%). This data is highest (44.8%) of "illiterate" among all others deciding about their marriage in which parents have sole role for decision Moreover, role of decision for marriage "parents consulting with respondents" is highest of "others" by caste, "Higher Education" (40%) by Educational Level and "Job" holder (44.4%) by occupation. By occupation, student occupied highest position (100%) and others occupied lowest position (36.4%) by self for deciding about their marriage. Similarly, role of decision making for "Selling and Buying of Assets" by self is

much less in the study area but their role is higher to decide for selling and buying of assets by jointly (Table 2).

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents by Background Characteristics and By Decision Making

Background Attributes	Decision for Daily Consuming Food					Decision about Education Enrollment of Kids				Total	
	Self (%)	Both (%)	Jointly with laws	Mother in Law	Oneself	Husband	Consulting with husband	Father in law	Combine within laws		
Caste											
Maharjan	25.2	50.5	9.3	15.0	.9	13.1	69.2	13.1	.9	100.0	107
Others*	33.3	27.8	11.1	27.8	5.6	16.7	55.6	11.1	5.6	100.0	18
Educational Level											
Illiterate	31.0	62.1	6.9	.0	3.4	6.9	82.8	.0	6.9	100.0	29
Up to SLC	32.6	54.3	8.7	4.3	2.2	.0	93.5	4.3	.0	100.0	46
Higher Education	18.0	32.0	12.0	38.0	6.0	4.0	64.0	10.0	16.0	100.0	50
Occupation											
Student	.0	50.0	.0	50.0	.0	.0	50.0	.0	50.0	100.0	1
Housewife	31.8	47.7	9.1	11.4	4.5	6.8	84.1	2.3	2.3	100.0	44
Business	21.7	60.9	13.0	4.3	4.3	.0	95.7	.0	.0	100.0	23
Job (Government & non government)	24.4	35.6	8.9	31.1	4.4	2.2	64.4	13.3	15.6	100.0	45
Others **	27.3	63.6	9.1	.0	.0	.0	90.9	.0	9.1	100.0	11

Source: Field Survey, 2018

Table 3 shows the role of decision making by Caste for "Daily Consuming Food" by "Self" is 25.2 percent of "Maharjan" and 33.3 percent of "Others". Similarly, by educational level, this data is highest of "Up to SLC" level (32.6%) and lowest of higher education (18.0%) deciding by self. By occupation, "Housewives" occupied the highest position (31.8%) and student occupied the lowest position. Moreover, deciding for "Education Enrolment of Kids" is seen highest of 'Consulting with husband' in all background attributes but by "Self" it is seen very less in all background characteristics.

Table4: Distribution of Respondents by Allowing to Use Family Income

	Allowed to use family Income				
	Yes	No	Total		
Caste					
Maharjan	68.2	31.8	100.0	107	
Others*	77.8	22.2	100.0	18	
Educational Level					
Illiterate	72.4	27.6	100.0	29	
Up to SLC	67.4	32.6	100.0	46	
Higher Education	70.0	30.0	100.0	50	
Occupation					
Student	50.0	50.0	100.0	2	
Housewife	63.6	36.4	100.0	44	
Business	78.3	21.7	100.0	23	
Job(Government & non government)	73.3	26.7	100.0	45	
Others**	63.6	36.4	100.0	11	

Source: Field Survey, 2018.

It is revealed from Table 4 that by caste 'Others' (77.8%) occupied more than Maharjan (68.2%) "Allow to Use Family Income". This data is highest of 'Illiterate'(72.4%) and least of "Up to SLC" (67.4%) by "Educational level". By occupation 'Business' (78.3%) has the highest proportion and 'Student' (50%) has the least proportion "Allowing to Use Family Income".

Decision Making in Overall

To analyze the women's decision making power four variables have been chosen as marriage, selling and buying of assets, daily consumption food and education enrollment of kids. If women have participated in decision making by "Self" than it is considered women are enjoying a high degree of autonomy in decision making in the family.

Table 5: Distribution of Respondents by Decision Making in Overall

Decision in Overall chosen variable	Frequency(By Self)	Percent
Decision of Marriage	61	60.4
Decision for selling and buying of Assets	2	2.0
Decision for daily consumption food	5	5.0
Decision about education enrollment of Kids	33	32.7
Total	101	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2018.

Table 5 reveals that above three-fourths (60.4%) women played important role in deciding about their marriage in the study area however for making decision on selling and buying of assets and daily consumption food it is seen below one-tenths indicates that still women do not enjoy a high degree of autonomy in decision making in the family and also are deprived to make

decision on assets and about the food they require for their daily life. It is seen quite satisfactory from the above table 5 that at least nearly two-fifths (32.7%) respondents decide for education enrollment of kids.

In one of the cases, a woman Ganga Shrestha (name changed) is housewife who is 45 years old woman living at Panga Kirtipur-5 and has studied up to grade 5. She is from joint family including her husband, son, daughter, mother in law, father in law and sister in law. Though she has her own house and land but the legal owner of her house and land is father in law. She has her own saving and shares. But while buying and selling the property of her own, she is not informed to make decision and her father in law made decision for that purpose. She had married at the age of 20 and no consent was taken even for her marriage. She became unable to continue her education since each and every time she had to do household chores. Being not more educated woman or as being as woman she is away taking decision for treatment of family members including her and for daily food consumption. Also she has not engaged in any income generating activities. Therefore, she is not playing any vital role for overall decision making process in household level”.

Discussions

The study on women's autonomy in household decision making carried out by Acharya et. al. in 2010 found that women who live in hilly areas have more autonomy towards the decision making process and their husbands are more likely to support them. Similarly, the study of the role of gender and ethnicity in household decision-making conducted in Chitwan Nepal in 1999 by Devkota et. al., found that Brahmin women were confined in house and kept with regular mundane household chores which prevented them from taking decision regarding selling and purchasing goods in the market, making their male counterpart as the sole source to take the decisions as compares to Tharu and Gurung ethnic groups (Devkota et. al. 1999). Moreover, the study carried out by Acharya and Bennett in 1983 on women and the subsistence sector: economic participation and household decision making in Nepal clearly noted that the practice of seclusion of women (pardah) is prevalent in Terai region especially for newly married women while women in Hills and Mountains have more freedom of mobility and greater access to familial and economic resources after marriage. Low incomes together with lack of right to property have limited the role of women in the decision making about the allocation of household income (NHDR, 2004). But in this study the researcher also found that most of the women in the study area are enjoying high degree of autonomy deciding their marriage by onself however in other sectors their participation is feeble.

In Bangladesh more than one third women are not involved in their household decision making (Rahman et. al., 2014). The study of Jejeebhoy & Sathat in 2001 in Ethopai, nation wide found only 44 percent participated in four type of decision (own health care, big purchase, daily purchases and visiting families) and 8 percent of women don not participate in any of decisions. A comparative study of the socio economic status of women in the Jyapu community of lalitpur and Bhaktapur districts of Nepal (Shrestha, Maharjan and Rajbhandari, 2015) found Jyapu women were not sufficiently empowered economically to play a major role in wider decision making processes. However, the researcher in this study found better educated women are more likely to make decisions jointly with their spouse in selling and buying of assets, and enrolling their kids in

education sector. Furthermore, for the decision of marriage either by caste wise or by educational level or by occupation women is more likely to make decision by oneself however in other sectors the decision of women by oneself is seen feeble.

Conclusion:

This study has focused to analyze the effect of household decision making power of married women of the age group 15-60 years. Though the respondents have allowed using family income they are still deprived to participate in decision making for selling and buying of assets, even for basic requirement of their needs and so on. Though education is helping women to uplift their status but is helping to increase the ability to choose spouse whereas women lag behind making important decision regarding how much to spend for food, going to the market freely and buy daily consuming food and even they have to wait for the decision of their spouse or father/mother law for their kids to enroll in education sector. Therefore, different activities that influence men to think that women are just made for household works and various opportunities are to be provided that help women to increase their livelihoods and earnings activities.

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