Chapter I

Introduction

Women and men are an essential resource of all nations and societies and their status determines the level of progress attained by society in real terms. It is almost universally accepted that traditionally women’s position in all societies has been one of general subordination to man. The perpetuation of men-women inequality paved the way for men and women to be systematically channeled into social positions that provided greater amount of rewards and privileges to men than to women. This in turn has resulted in unequal distribution of power and authority. In all societies men have wielded more power and occupied superior position. The inferior status of the women was traditionally and culturally reinforced. Accordingly men used to occupy social positions that gave greater rewards to themselves than to women, making them dominant group in the society (Gore: 1968).

The family particularly Hindu family throughout India had a basic pattern, this was caste based and patriarchal in nature. In traditional patriarchal family, the eldest male member was the head of the family and he used to take all the decisions on family matters. Women in family had a very inferior position compared to their male counterparts. They were appreciated only for their role as mothers of male children. Their primary role was that of a home maker and it was the duty of the man to
provide subsistence to his family. Women were economically dependent on their husbands, which did not allow them to gain a position of authority in the family as well as in the society (Hate: 1930).

Differential value was attached to the activities performed by men and women. Activities related to the household sphere were considered as the Wife’s domain. Thus the role men performed consisted of ‘exchange value work’ (Nielson: 1978) since it was in the public sphere and that of the women consisted of ‘use value work’ (Nielson: 1978) as it was in the private sphere. The differential values attached to the work performed by men and women resulted in the hierarchisation of tasks. This has been perpetuated through tradition and culture and ingrained in the minds of men and women, which has become a seedbed for further division between male and female. It has been argued that internalization of male-female division leads to a system where men exercise more power than women (Chodorow: 1978).

Such a psyche has been maintained through generations in most of the societies through patriarchal family system, which has formed the basis for the authority structure within the family. The male-female differences contributed to the reinforcement of authority structure and asymmetry in power to the extent that it was accepted as a way of life. The patriarchs controlled the power relations in public and private sphere, thereby restricting collective action by women.
Just a few decades ago, the issues relating to women’s wellbeing that enhances their status at home and at society have come to receive better attention. A shift from subsistence economy to wage economy resulted in households becoming gradually less patriarchal. Subsequent changes in the job market led to the gradual increase in women’s participation in labour force. A wide range of non-manual jobs emerged for the first time in the economic sphere, which gave an opening for women to enter the labour force. In the face of these early structural developments, changes were also evident in the family, especially in the realm of gender roles and power relations. In other words, the changing socio-economic conditions, particularly after independence, have widened opportunities for women’s education and employment in particular, empowering them to assume responsible office of decision making and financial independence in the world, so far dominated by men. Women’s emergence from exclusive seclusion from home to work outside the four walls of house has amounted almost to a silent social revolution. This development, with regard to the status of women, which is spreading in diverse sections of the society, has offered a vast field of sociological interest (Kapoor: 1974).

Educated women of modern India are increasingly entering the remunerative vocations that were traditionally the preserves of men. With this very important socio-economic change, the urban educated
women of India in particular, have achieved a new status and a role. Educated Women today hold some measure of influence or informal power. The degree varies with the gender system and their culture, the status of class, caste, community or religious sect to which they belong (Reddy: 1986).

There is a rapid transformation in recent years in the role and status of women in different spheres of life. Status and role are also interlinked with the concept of power and position. The dominant opinion in women’s studies today is that a role confers social, political or cultural power on the individual. In other words, status is determined to a great extent by the power enjoyed by men and women in the domestic and social spheres. Today status is evaluated also in terms of social and economic indicators such as income, property or opportunities and skills that open up opportunities of employment, better health etc. Access to or denial of these services confers or denies power to an individual or group. Many also understand power to mean one’s ability to take independent decisions on personal matters like education, career, marriage, fertility, divorce, remarriage, etc. even in the face of opposition or as “women’s ability to determine important events in their lives, even when others are opposed to them” (Talwar: 1984). In the present-day context education, economic independence, employment and political participation are the major indices of women’s status in a
society. These indices are adjudged on the basis of power in the social, economic, political and religious fields (Siddiqui: 2001).

In India, since independence women have gained enhanced status both legally and socially. The growth of education and technological advancement has led to the entry of a large number of women into different sectors of modern life. It has been said that the growing trend of educated women working in the society has elevated their status and that they have come to acquire a more or less equal position with their husbands in the family. In course of this development, the educated working women have not only broken the traditional domestic drudge image, but are now more actively involved in decision-making both at home and beyond and are emerging with more respectable status in the society (Reddy:1986).

The term ‘status’ refers to a position of an individual in the social structure defined by his or her designed rights and obligations. Each status position is expressed in terms of role. Since each individual occupies a number of distinct statuses within a society, he or she performs a variety of roles. Status is realized through one’s role. The concept of status is used to indicate that the ordering of individuals in terms of attributes such as level of education, occupation, income, etc. and these attributes are responsible for the status and role of women which varies from country to country. Thus, ‘status’ is the location or
position of an individual in a system of social relationships, while ‘role’ is the behaviour associated with the position (Linton: 1976). Therefore, each status position is expressed in terms of a role that is, a pattern of behaviour expected of the occupant of that status. There are various definitions which have been used to convey the meaning of the term ‘status’. In the present study, the term ‘status’ has been used time and again referring to working women’s rights and privileges. It is the position of a person on some implicit or explicit scale of what is socially valued, which represents her ability to participate and influence the decision-making process of the family. Thus, employment has been taken as an important factor in evaluating the status of women in respect of their decision-making power in the family. In other words, the status of working women in the family would be measured in terms of their power to take important decisions at home.

**Traditional Role and Status of Women in Hindu society:**

A historical study of woman in India reveals that there were distinct stages of rise and fall in her status. Women in the Vedic times enjoyed a very high status. In the *Rig Vedic age* women and men were co-partners in life. Women enjoyed the property rights and had access to the property of their father and husband. They also had the right to take education. However, the position of women deteriorated considerably
after the *later Vedic age*. During this period, a wife was expected to obey her husband in all familial matters. The Hindu law giver Manu had made woman entirely dependent on man and subjugated her to the authority of a father, husband and son in the different periods of her life as daughter, wife and mother. She had to perform all the duties towards her husband, home and children and had to bear a lot of difficulties (Altekar: 1973).

In the *Mahabharata*, it has been stated that women should always be protected and looked after by men as they are weak. As women are sensitive in nature they are to be treated with love and affection. In Hindu society, the position of a son was more favorable than that of a daughter. In order to learn and be familiar with all the caste and family traditions, she was expected to help her mother in the household work and in the social and religious ceremonies. By being familiar with all the customs and traditions, she was also expected to learn all the procedures of performing puja and all other religious and family rites. Her parents used to prepare her in order to be a good and dutiful daughter-in-law.

In the laws of Manu the standardized rules for women’s behaviour are as follows: “A woman must regard and worship her husband as God, even though he may be deprived of virtue. A woman should be kept in dependence by her husband because by nature, they are emotional and unfaithful. Those women who are able to suffer these bonds of control
are regarded as the ideal woman. The salvation and happiness of women depends on their virtue and purity as daughters, wives and widows.”

As various literatures tell us, Bengali women also had a world of their own, a world that was very much secluded and confined within the four walls of their houses. The birth of a girl child used to be considered as a mishap by many Bengali families, especially among higher caste people. The wife expecting children used to pray to the Almighty for the birth of a male child as that would enhance her standing in family and social circles. Mother-in-law was the real guardian of her son’s wife and in many cases she had very little sympathy for her daughter-in-law. Thus, taking up gainful employment by women outside home was beyond their thought and imagination (Chakravarty: 1963).

The exclusion of women from education and employment made them dependent on their husbands and they were deprived of all freedom and privileges in their own family. However with the efforts of social reformers, Bengali women started realizing their degraded position and showed interest to take education and gainful employment to raise their position both in family and wider society. As a result, in course of time the middle class women in particular, started joining in different services, became more economically independent and this gave them more power to actively participate in decision making process within their own respective families as well as in public affairs (Bagchi: 2005).
It must be mentioned that the advent of *British rule* however, brought many changes in the Indian society. It was completely a new political rule for the Indians which had deep rooted implications on the Indian economy and the ideology of the people. The spread of English education which was a characteristic of British rule and the intermixture of Western and eastern cultures enabled women to realize their subordinate position and persuaded them to regain their legitimate status. The various Hindu Revivalist organizations such as the *Arya Samaj* and the *Brahma Samaj* gave a great impetus to the awakening of womanhood. There were two major movements which affected the Indian society during the pre-independence period and these were: the Social Reform movement of the nineteenth century and the Nationalist Movement of the Twentieth century. One common question raised by both these movements was that of equal status of women. The nineteenth century social reformers criticized the issues such as Sati, the ill-treatment of widows, the ban on widow re-marriage, polygamy, child marriage, and denial of property rights and the education of women. The social reformers felt that these were the social evils which the Indian society was being threatened with, and hence these social evils had to be immediately eradicated by bringing about consciousness among the people and making them sensitive to the injustice being done to women.
They felt that, by educating women and by introducing certain legislation, social change could be brought about (Sood: 1991).

The movement for the emancipation of women which slowly started from the middle of the 19th century was quickened in the 20th century. The Nationalist Movement particularly during the Gandhian phase also was a very powerful force which helped to change the position and attitude of society towards women.

It must be mentioned that women from lower strata of society, despite of the deprivations of social privileges, took part in home economy, right from the beginning, as hard economic necessity compelled those women to work as manual labourers but it was not socially recognized as a sign of economic independence. Women from the higher strata were confined within their own homes. The rapid industrialization created general employment opportunities from which women have benefitted. Although women are mostly employed at the lower levels in unskilled occupation, yet it has helped them to become economically independent. The process of urbanization enabled women to get exposed to education, information, health care, drudgery deduction and employment opportunities. The industrial and technological development also affected the structure and function of Indian families. The new forces substantially contributed to economic independence of women in the family.
In today’s society, education, employment, income, and social participation are the important variables determining the status of women. These status variables empower women with autonomy and decision making power and these are considered as the development resources for women. Since education provides opportunities for personal advancement, awareness of social mobility, therefore educated women today have greater degree of decision making power. Today, in urban areas we find more and more educated women who take up employment outside their home (Dandekar: 1965).

Women’s employment represents their access to financial resources, control over income and their contributions to household expenditure. It is because of their ability to share family budget, they are able to strengthen their position in family and fortify autonomy in family decisions (Krishnaraj and Chanana: 1989). Today, not only in Bengali society but in every society, women’s outlook has changed to a great extent. Education has helped them in changing their attitudes and mentalities. They realize that they are counter-parts of men, their equals and not their subordinates.

Although, it is agreed that education, occupational status, income are the significant resources for women which provide a power base with which they can acquire decision making power, but the same perspective doesn’t hold true in all Indian families where power is not
defined strictly in terms of resources. In Indian social system, it is also a fact that, a variety of cultural and socio-psychological factors play a part in how much autonomy a woman has not only in relation to her husband but also in relation to her sons and elders. The patriarchal norms entail husband with all the decision making power irrespective of resources he possesses. Women in many cases are unable to translate their earning into power. In many Indian families till today, women equally share economic burden of families but, they are practically without any decision making power. In an ideal home, the final say in all matters related to the family is always with the husband and this clearly indicates the discrimination between sexes in the decision making process. Traditional Hindu family leaves very limited final say in family decisions to the wives. However, it is seen that education and employment has enabled women to a great extent to improve their status in regard to decision making power within the family (Dube: 1989). It is said that in families, where women make economic contribution to the budget, the situation may be slightly different (Madan: 1976).

It is true that, education has a deep impact on women’s attitudes and values and as a result more and more urban women in particular, are entering the workforce, seeking their identity as members of society equal to male members and also seeking power in different areas of decision making both in family and society (Blumberg: 1984).
In the traditional Hindu family, women were less educated compared to male members and hence their participation in decision making process was not encouraged much. Normally, a wife’s power in decision making used to start from her giving birth to children. The birth of the child was the real integrating factor for a wife to join hands in home management. Due to patriarchal tradition, in case a wife was issueless, her position became very embarrassing. She used to enjoy her position only in terms of her seniority and her contribution to the family in terms of giving birth to children.

The position of women in Bengali society was also similar. Till the 2nd half of the 19th century the birth of a girl child was considered to be a curse by many families in Bengal, especially among the higher caste Hindus. Marriage was considered compulsory for man and woman and for a woman it was a social institution to serve the whole household of the bridegroom. There was of course, no divorce permitted under the traditional Hindu law and marriage was a lifelong affair. The purdah system in upper caste family made the women’s position worse as they had little opportunity to see the outer world to broaden their outlook. Women were not allowed to go for education and this prevented them from attaining a position in which they could fight back against the odds that were prevalent during that period.
The exclusion of women from education and life outside the household, were of course coming under the fire of criticism from the social reformers in Bengal during that period. They fought against the Sati, polygamy. Child marriage and tried to legalize the widow marriage and to build up facilities for formal education for women.

The reformers brought no doubt, some relief to the women of the orthodox Hindu population, but even more valuable was their contribution towards the germination of new aspirations and a new consciousness among Bengali women themselves in the 2nd half of the 19th century (Urquhart:1983).

The reformers in Bengali society had done much for the progress of women education and there is certainly positive advancement among Bengali women. Now the fact is that, more women are going to university and having a direct impact upon their careers. Today, many modern Bengali women are financially independent with high level jobs. Thus, it is clear that women have certainly challenged many attitudes towards the position of women in the family and in the larger society. As Bengali women became more and more economically independent, the process of their empowerment within the family and outside became a feasible phenomenon. It is reflected in their active participation in the decision making process within their respective families as well as public affairs (B. Debi: 1988). The introduction of education and
employment opportunity has brought a momentum for women in Bengali Society.

**Key Conceptual issues:**

A brief discussion on the key conceptual issues about certain terms and phrases such as ‘educated working women’, ‘economic independence’, ‘family and household’, ‘patriarchy’, ‘power’, ‘decision making process’ etc. which occur frequently in this study is considered essential for clarity and better understanding of the subject matter. In the following paragraphs, an attempt has been made to clarify the concept and meaning of those terms and phrases.

**Educated Working Women:**

In the present study, a working women is defined as one who is gainfully engaged in full time continuous employment and those who are not engaged in social work or are doing ‘honorary jobs’. The term ‘educated’ refers to those women who have completed at least the higher secondary examination as their minimum educational qualification and those educated working women who are married and living with their own family. The present study intends to know the educational label of the respondents and also the role played by education and employment in their lives in families.
Economic Independence:

Economic independence creates a sense of self standing and self satisfaction in the mind of one than one who is economically dependent on others. The studies have shown that greater the resources like income, occupational prestige and educational attainment of a person, the greater the person’s power within the family (Blood and Wolfe: 1960). Economic dependence, especially among women, makes them virtually a slave as they are unable to live and lead a life of their own liking. It has been argued that women’s participation in income generating activities is a central feature of their ability to gain power relative to man. Economic independence is hypothesized to reduce gender inequality in the household through increase in women’s freedom of movement, participation in household decision making and lower physical violence on the part of husbands or other men (Blumberg: 1984).

Family and household:

Family and household are both culturally defined. The household may appear as a task oriented unit and the family as a kin-specified group. It is through their commitment to the concept of family that people are recruited by the marital relations of the household. In others words, it is a family that lives in a household. According to I.P Desai
(1964), a household composed of the members of an elementary family, should not be called an elementary family if they are related with members of a wider kin group. In brief, a household is not necessarily a family. He says that the central defect of the Census Approach is that the family is understood as conglomeration of individuals and its classification is solely on the basis of the number of persons composing it. He also says that, it is necessary to have an idea of the relationship among the members of a family in order to classify it as joint or nuclear. We generally call family as nuclear if it is composed of parents and their unmarried children. However there are some nuclear families which are structurally nuclear but functionally joint i.e. they migrated to some other place and established their separate household yet, they maintain their fund ties with the joint family, which Desai (1964) calls as ‘Marginal joint family’.

A.M. Shah (1973) says the household is one of the several dimensions of the family. ‘Family’ on the one hand ,refers to genealogical models, without any definite indication of the activities or functions of the persons and on other hand, the household is a residential and domestic unit composed of one or more persons living under the same roof and eating food cooked in a single kitchen. There can be single member household also. However, these two terms are often used together. Shah’s work provides a conceptual distinction between the
kinship-oriented family and the residence-oriented household which provides analytical clarity in the understanding of the family, both as a social ideal and a social fact.

Census Report (2001) has clearly defined ‘Household’ as a group of persons who normally live together and take their meals from a common kitchen. Persons in a household may be related or unrelated or a mixture of both. However, if a group of unrelated persons live in a house but do not take their meals from a common kitchen, then they are not constituent of a common household. In this case, each person must be treated as a separate household. Thus, there may be one member households, two member households or multi member households.

Kapadia (1972) emphasizes the change in the family structure in the sense that today there are not only the residential and functional joint families but families living as nuclear units and having obligations which are also significant. Gore (1968) Kapadia (1972) and Ross (1973) have referred to woman’s role in family, and their changing status in the family. Another aspect of their studies was the intra-household dimensions of women’s work distribution of resources, power and authority within the family and its social and political implications. In the present study, ‘family’ has been taken as a genealogical group where members may not live in the same residence but have obligations towards one another. However, it must be also kept in mind that, if the
couple and their children live alone, the kind of relationship which exists between husband and wife may be significantly different from what it would be if they lived in joint family residence. Thus a broader perspective has been followed taking ‘household’ as one of the dimensions of family for re-examining the changes (if any) in women’s status as a result of their entry into gainful employment.

**Patriarchy:**

The word ‘Patriarchy’ literally means the rule of the father or the ‘patriarch’ and originally it was used to describe a specific type of male dominated family. In Bengali society, it is called ‘*pitrítonto*’. In all Hindu society, patriarchy is a system which is believed to be based on the notion that every individual man is always in a dominant position and every woman in a subordinate one (Mies: 1980).

Patriarchy is different in different classes in the same society, in different societies and in different periods in history. But the broad principles remain the same, i.e. men are in control, but the nature of this control may differ.

The institution of the family is probably the most patriarchal. A man is considered as the head of the family. He controls women’s sexuality, labour or production, reproduction and mobility. There is hierarchy in which man is superior and dominant, woman is inferior and
subordinate. The family is perhaps the most important agency for socializing the next generation in patriarchal values (Basin: 1993).

Women are always considered as weak and therefore, their role and influence in decision making, both at home and outside is by and large, restricted with greater share given to man. The present works intends to study whether today, women’s education and gainful employment has brought any change in the decision making process of the patriarchal family.

**Decision making process:**

Decision making is a term here very often used, to describe the process by which families make choices, determine judgments and come to conclusions. Decision making process in family requires more than one member’s input and agreement (Scanzoni and Polonko: 1980). The family decision making process is a communication activity. It is an unavoidable, daily process. Families are confronted with a variety of decisions, including the purchase of products, the selection of educational practices, and the choice of recreational activities and so on. Families use a variety of processes for actually reaching a decision. It has to be mentioned that, decision making is inextricably bound to values (James and Stephen: 1990). In decision making, values are communicated within the family and then become part of family’s
foundation. In patriarchal family, women are taught the values that they should obey the decisions which are given by male members. However, families that use discussion and consensus as their mode of reaching decision are said to be more democratic. Decision making in family is one of the ways of the female empowerment. Participation in decision making process in family matters considers that a female is accounted for in the family. Decision making in family necessarily involves power and authority for coming to a final decision (Barbara: 2001). Several new researches draw attention to the economic power of the family members that influence decision making in the family. Thus in the present context, it is important to define the meaning of the term ‘power’.

**Power:**

Power is a widely used concept and therefore has accumulated many layers of meanings. Power is neither force nor authority, but it makes both force and authority possible. Talcott parsons, (1959) defined power from a functionalist point of view and said that power is employed in the furtherance of sectional interest. According to the Marxian perspective, the source of power lies in the economic infrastructure (Engels: 1948).
Max Weber (1946) has dealt with the concept of power adequately. He defines power as ‘the probability that one actor will be able to realize his own objectives even against opposition from others with whom he is in a social relationship’. Power is relationships, however, also involves intentions and aims, plans, strategies on each partner’s part. Weber has not mentioned power specifically in the context of the family. However, his ideas of ‘traditional’ power of corporate groups may be considered as appropriate in relation to family. Power resides implicitly, in other’s dependency (Emerson: 1986). In most of the traditional patriarchal families man dominates and perhaps this is possible on account of the economic role that male members play (Ogburn: 1955). Married women’s role is primarily to bear children and stay at home and these circumstances created favorable situation for male dominance. A comprehensive study done by Murdock (1949) which examined 250 primitive societies has brought out the fact that most of the societies operated under husband dominance than under any other system. It is only recently that there has been a rise in the employment of women which provided them the necessary opportunity to contribute to the family income. This has given them independence and increased skill to acquire decision making power in the family.
In sociological analysis of marital relations, power is often associated with resources brought into a marriage by each spouse. The resources are usually economic in nature namely occupational status, income etc. In most of the societies, these resources are unequally distributed between men and women, former having a greater share. It is important to note that the resources that women control for e.g. domestic competence, socialization skills and other attributes, which are essential for an efficient management of marital and family life are not perceived as valuable as economic assets. When a society attaches significance to resources which are material and not human in nature, the marital power of wives is undermined (Ramu: 1988). However, today many women are taking gainful employment and various studies have shown that their earning has increased their ability to exert bargaining power in their family (Kilbourne: 1989).

It is important in the studies of family relations to make the distinction between power and influence. Power is rooted in tradition, codified by custom and sanctioned by norms. Being an elderly male confers a certain degree of power and it is ascriptive in this sense. Influence, on the other hand is achieved. It is an ability on the part of the spouse to impose his or her opinion in subtle ways in order to accomplish a desired outcome. Wolfe (1972) maintains that, influence is often based on the personal attributes. Thus while man retains power in
normative sense, in reality women also exercise significant influence quite often covertly, on important matters. Hence in order to study the power relation in family, one should take into account all these aspects which play very important role in family decision making process.

**Survey of Literature:**

To draw a clear, definite and representative picture of the families of working women, survey of the literature published and unpublished relating to various regions and sections of the society would be fruitful in and relevant to the present context.

Altekar (1973) in his remarkable work “*The position of women in Hindu Civilization*” has mentioned about the position of women in traditional patriarchal joint family where women had to live a subjugated life right from their birth till death. He says, in Vedic Age marriage was compulsory for women and after marriage supreme authority was clearly vested in the husband and the wife’s position was one of honorable subordination. The position of a widow was even more pathetic. She had to live like a servant in her deceased husband’s house. Women, like Sudras were not eligible for Vedic studies.

The author has also mentioned about the gradual disruption of the joint family system and the progressive realization of the usefulness of female education, particularly among the advanced sections of Hindu
society. In fact this book has nicely narrated the life history and development of women’s position from the earliest times to the present day and in the conclusion also tried to suggest few solutions connected with the problems of women.

Kapur (1972), one of the few notable social scientists in the country, has taken an abiding interest in studying the course and pattern of changes in the life and attitude of educated married working women in India. In her pioneering work ‘The Changing Status of Working Women in India’ she mentioned that, after the Independence of India the changed socio-economic conditions have made it imperative for women particularly belonging to the lower and middle class to take up gainful employment. She has argued that this emancipation of women from their set tradition-bound ethos has mainly been instrumental in changing their life. Her findings also indicate that working women have come to realize that work gives them personal status and an independent social standing. With the change in woman’s personal status and social stature, there has come a change in her way of thinking and feeling.

Kapadia (1958) in her work ‘Marriage and Family in India’ opines that the employment of women, which has become possible through education, has also greatly affected the status and role of women in the family. The studies done by this social scientist, firstly , offered a
kind of analysis and explanation to how and why women had less power and how this situation have changed to some extent.

The systematic study to delineate the causes of women’s subordination emerged with Simone De Beauvoir’s book ‘The Second Sex’ (1981). De Beauvoir argues that women became objects while providing services to men. According to her, man in patriarchal structure declares himself as ‘self’ and women as ‘others’. She maintains that though a woman is not the only other who is oppressed, yet the oppression of women is unique. She also argues that the role of a wife and mother limits a woman’s self development. In these role a women is turned into an object, into a machine for cooking, cleaning, caring, giving and sacrificing. To escape from these she suggests three strategies: a) women must go out to work; b) women should become intellectuals; and c) women should work towards social transformation.

In another study on family, Goode (1965) in his work ‘World Revolution and Family Patterns’ has viewed that previously, at the turn of the century, only a few women took up jobs, but the situation has changed today and he says that, women are coming in increasing numbers to take up jobs, for they want to work and raise their position in the family. Industrialization is the main explanation for the trend towards egalitarian relations within and outside the family Goode observes that women gain greater amount of satisfaction and confidence
through jobs. The availability of the job for women with the change in the economic structure and organization permitted meant that women no longer necessarily depend on the husband (or father) for support.

Ginsberg (1967) in his book ‘Life Styles of Educated women’ has rightly mentioned that one important factor which is related to change in the social position of women is education. Infact education and industrialization have gone hand in hand. He argues that, the more education a woman has, the more likely she is to be in the labour force. Various American studies have shown that there is a definite correlation between the educational level of women and their employment.

M. S. Gore (1968) in his book ‘Urbanization and Family Change’ has said that a woman’s status in the family would be definitely related to whether she is engaged in gainful economic activity or not. According to him a woman’s lower status in the family is related to her exclusion from economic activity. Their participation in the economic activity of the society tends to modify the relational system within the family and to influence their status in a positive manner. He supports this observation by comparing the lower with the upper caste families in the Indian context in which it was found that for the lower caste women the problem of inherited property is almost non-existent and they usually participate in gainful activities and enjoy considerable amount of
freedom as compared to the upper caste women who do not participate in gainful activities or excluded from economic activities.

Ann Oakley (1972) in his writing on ‘Sex, Gender and society’ has discussed about men-women differences in society and wanted to find out the answer of the question- ‘does the source of the differences between the sexes lie in biology or culture? However, he has also agreed that, modern technology has altered the necessary impact of biology on society and narrowed down the differences between men and women.

T.N. Madan (1976) in ‘Indian Women: Purdah to Modernity’ has said that the key to an improvement in the position of a woman at home is her access to an independent income. More significantly the women’s exposure to outer world has changed their attitudes and modes of living to a great extent. Infact the consequences of the employment of women for the family are far-reaching.

D.G.Mandelbaum (1988) was the first American anthropologist to do fieldwork in India and in his book ‘Women’s seclusion and Men’s Honor: Sex Roles in North India’ he has mentioned about the position of women in Indian culture. The focus in this book is on ‘purdah’ which secluded women from the outer world. He has also said that the system of ‘purdah’ resulted in the economic dependence of women, particularly in their exclusion from the control over productive resources. The author says that the ‘purdah’ system is an elaborate socio-cultural pattern of
male domination in which women are almost totally subordinated to men and excluded from the social arena.

Pratibha Jain and Rajan’s (1996) book ‘Women Images’ provides revealing analysis and an insight about a variety of issues that are crucial to an understanding of the multiplicity of women images in Indian Society. The commonly perceived image of women in India is that of the self-sacrificing individual. Pativrata, the cultural ethos reflects an essential plurality of visions and emphasizes upon the “complementarities of men and women”. The essays in this anthology illuminate a variety of images of women from ancient to modern times as reflected through art, literature, classical and folk traditions. It emerges from the essays that women images do exert a powerful influence on the social order and situation of Indian women in many ways. It emphasizes that though images are usually seen as ‘historical indices of social conditions’, their real significance resides not merely in being ‘historical scraps’ but in providing perennial pointers of ideal possibilities. This anthology is intended to contribute to an objective understanding of the perceptions, visions and ideas about Indian women with a view to providing them an identity for their role in society.

Hate (1930) in her report on ‘The socio-economic conditions of Educated Women in Bombay City’ said that a deep and vital change was taking place in the economic condition and personal status of women.
Her findings indicate that the change in women’s attitude towards various issues of life had, in turn affected their behavior patterns in various spheres of life.

Maria Mies (1980) in her book ‘Indian women and Patriarchy’ has pointed out that women’s role and influence in decision making, both at home and outside is, by and large, restricted with greater share given to man. She also has mentioned that, in order to maintain domestic peace, in most of the families, very few attempts are made by the women members to question the dominance of male authority and thus remain in a subordinate position in the family.

While talking about women’s decision making power in family, Maitreye Dixit (1998) in her work ‘Women and Achievement, Dynamics of Participation and Partnership’ has referred to the patriarchal structure of Hindu society and says that, in patriarchal system women are always considered as weak, fragile and needs protection of men at all stages of life and therefore, are not in a position to participate in decision-making process in the family.

U Lalita Devi (1982) in her book ‘Status and employment of women in India’ has pointed out that Women’s economic dependence on men affects their power within the family. Therefore, with increased participation in income earning activities, there will be not only more
income for the family but gender inequality will also be reduced to much extent.

Usha S. Kanhere (1987) in ‘women and Socialization’ has examined the role and status of women and differential socialization of boys and girls in a few Hindu families in the metropolis of Ahmadabad and also pointed out the prevalence of patriarchal value system resulting in sex segregation, sex linked work patterns and ideology which supports subordination and obedience on the part of women. She has referred to the area of women and work and the implication of remunerative work on raising of women’s status. Unlike some other social thinkers, she is of the opinion that, remunerative work may not always enhance the status or empower women because it depends largely on the type of family from which a woman belongs, but, it does expose her to wider life.

Tara Singal (2003) in ‘Working women and Family’ says that the family decisions have been changed from a male dominated toward more egalitarian joint decision.

M. Indira Devi (1987) in ‘Women- Employment: Family Living- A study of emerging Hindu Wives in Urban India’ says that decision making is an activity process by which a course of action is consciously chosen from available alternatives. This process involves three stages, namely; awareness of the situation, evaluation of
alternatives and taking the final decision. She also pointed out that, with reference to decision making in the family, while in the first two stages various members of the family may be involved, but in the final stage, someone will have final say. This generally rests with the person who has ultimate responsibility on the family front. Just as roles go with status, decision making goes with roles.

Leela Dube (1988) in her edited volume ‘Visibility and Power-Essays on Women in Society and Development’ emphasized that, gender differences are embedded in our culture. The distinction between feminine work and masculine work comes early in childhood and becomes sharper as the child grows up. Therefore, it takes many years for women to acquire any power of decision making or any autonomy within the family.

Usha Talwar (1984) in her work titled ‘Social Profile of Working Women’ has made an attempt to understand the facts of life of the working women. The book also presents a comparison between working and nonworking women, more particularly on the division of labour, decision making in the family and their marital relations.

In an edited book ‘Changing status and role of women in Indian Society’ C. Chakrapani and S.V. Kumar (1994) says that education, employment, income and social participation are the important variables determining the status of women. These status variables empower
women with autonomy and decision making power and hence these are considered as the development resources for women. The authors also said that social participation outside home provides women with influence and enhances their social status. They gain self confidence as well as decision making power. According to them, the tangible resources provide women a power base with which they can gain decision making power in all family matters, including family planning.

R. Sinha (1993) in his book ‘Dynamics of Change in the Modern India’ has mentioned about the present contemporary Hindu family in the urban areas and says that modern urban Hindu families are undergoing a process of change during some past 50-60 years. The process of change has affected the roles and role obligations of the family members as well as their functional discharge. The book while assessing family change on a broad spectrum, specially analyses these changes in the roles and their functions. It also analyses how role obligations, role expectations and role discharge undergoing a processional change under the influence of higher education and higher status in the family.

G.N. Ramu (1988) in his book ‘Women, Work and Marriage in Urban India- A study of Dual and Single earner Couples’ has compared the domestic and marital lives of selected group of urban house wives with those of women who are in the labour similarities in the lives of
women, who are employed and those who are not. The author delineates the role of husbands in the context of the urban family and examines their attitudes towards women’s work. He also documents the conflicts that employed women experience as a result of their co-provider’s role and assesses the impact of their economic status on the domestic division of labour and on marital power.

Robert Blood and Donald Wolfe (1960) in their pioneering work ‘Husband and Wife: The Dynamics of Married Life’ have presented their resource theory of family power and agreed that, power exercised by husband or wife depends much more on the relative resources that each contribute to the family. They specifically focused on the resources of income, occupational prestige and educational attainment and based on interviews with 100s of middle class women in Detroit, demonstrated that, the greater the men’s resources in those areas, greater the men’s perceived power within the family. The resource theory of family power is influential in the sense that, it suggested the idea that opening up of women’s access to resources outside the family could result in a more evenly balanced distribution of power within the family.

Safilios-Rothschild (1970) in their work ‘The Study of Family Power Structure: A Review 1960-69’ says that, practically in all societies it is perceived that, males have more power in families because of patriarchal beliefs about male authority, although, there may be little
scientific justification for these perception, yet, they exert a strong influence in favour of male dominance in families that might be diminished through women’s entry into paid jobs.

John Scanzoni and Szinovacz (1980) in their work ‘Family Decision Making: a developmental Sex Role Model’ have tried to emphasize on the point that there is a close connection between gender roles and decision making power in the family. They says men become attached to position that exists in public sphere, women’s positions are found in the private sphere, i.e., most importantly, of course, in family. Further, the role men perform consists of ‘exchange value’ and this give men power to maintain the gender stratification system. In contrast, the role women perform generally consists of ‘use value’ and thus they have no power to change the existing stratification even if they wanted.

Cromwell and Olson (1975) in their work ‘The changing Positions of Women and Men in Comparative Perspective’ have studied on family decision making and reported that tangible resources such as education, job status and income have great influence on family decision making processes. The more tangible resources the husband has, the more the wife is likely to say that the husband ‘decides’. Income disparity between the husband and wife also enables us to understand the impact of income on decision making.
Safilios (1979) in his work ‘Sex-role Attitudes and the employment of Married Women’ says that, decision making in the family is a critical element in the assessment of the status of family members since it involves the allocation of resources and the distribution of role among the family members in the decision-making process. He also tried to focus our attention on who makes important vs. unimportant decisions, who makes frequent vs. infrequent decisions and how these dimensions interact. According to him, there are some important decisions such as whether or not to make a large expenditure such as changing residence or buying a car, schooling of children and so on. The unimportant decisions include menu planning or deciding to visit parents or in-laws. He presented data to show that due to the contribution to the family’s income, employed women now have equal share with their husband in most of the important areas of decision making and their implementation.

Kliger (1954) in his work ‘The effects of the Employment on the Married Women and Husband and Wife Role’ says that, working wives influence family decisions on major purchases, loans, savings and investments to a greater extent than does the non-working wives.

David M. Heer (1958) in edited volume ‘Dominance and the Working Wife’ from a sample containing respondents from all social classes found that, working wives made significantly more, really
important decisions such as, money centered and children centered decisions.

A deep understanding of the role played by education and employment in raising the status of women was presented by R. Sood (1991) in her study on ‘Changing Status and Adjustment of women’. The book says, education and employment have emancipated women from traditional socio-cultural rigidities to a considerable extent. Today, they enjoy a certain degree of autonomy, identity and self esteem. A sense of equality among women has reduced men’s superiority over them. She also emphasized that working women not only participate in decision-making, but they make their presence felt almost in all spheres of family life.

Shireen J. Jejeebhoy (1995) in ‘Women’s Education, Autonomy and Reproductive Behaviour: Experience from Developing Countries’ says that women with more education are considerably more involved in decision making than are uneducated women. The author says that a few years of schooling gives women certain amount of decision making power at least in routine or short term decisions. However, much more education is required for women to participate in long term and in important ones. The study shows that for many routine decisions such as seeking health care is made largely by the husbands of less educated
women where as moderately educated women took decisions by themselves.

Singh (1992) conducted a study on modernity and decision making in upbringing of children and in his book ‘Indian Women-Challenges and Change’ he mentioned that about 70% of the respondents of all categories expressed that both husband and wife should take decisions on children related issues. No respondent perceived that husband or wife alone should be a decision maker in giving education to the children.

Coming to the specific milieu under study, much has been written about the ‘Bengali women’ in books and articles, some academic and some journalistic. Some of the important books are noted here where mentions have been made about women in the family.

Usha Chakraborty (1963) in her book ‘Condition of Bengali Women- Around the 2nd half of the 19th Century’ has said that, the literature on Bengal in the 19th century is indeed voluminous but there are many aspects of Bengali life which have not yet been studied comprehensively. Thus an attempt has been made in this book to cover one such aspect over the years, to construct a general picture of a period on the basis of all the available evidence. The author has deliberately chosen this period to represent a segment of the Bengali women’s life, transitional no doubt, but without a spectacular beginning or end. In this
book the author mentioned the pattern of normal domestic life of a Bengali woman, her life outside the home (as prostitutes, beggars, social delinquents etc.), her educational life at home and the changes brought in her life due to efforts of Christian Missionaries in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. Thus the book throws light on many important aspects of life of a Bengali woman during the second half of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century.

Monalisa Bhattacharjee (2012) in her writing on ‘19\textsuperscript{th} Century Bengali Women and the Films of Satyajit Ray’ (Journal of Humanities and Social Science- Vol.3, Issue2-Sept-Oct, 2012) has tried to explore the condition of 19\textsuperscript{th} century Bengali women by analyzing the cinemas of Satyajit Ray. The author says that, the ‘Debi’ filmed by Satyajit Ray exposed the-then wretched condition of women in Bengali society in the first part of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. However, a change took place in the 2\textsuperscript{nd} half of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century through the spread of education and as a result women felt the taste of freedom. In ‘Charulata’ Satyajit Ray tried to highlight the changing circumstances in Bengali society. Thus, the author in her research article have chosen two films of the great director, Satyajit ray such as ‘Debi’ and ‘Charulata’ to depict the condition of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century Bengali women.

Ronald B. Indene (1976) in his book ‘Marriage and Rank in Bengali Culture-A History of Caste and Clan in Middle Period Bengal’ has done a detailed discussion on importance of caste and clan in
Bengali culture particularly in the selection of marriage partner. This study gives an account of marriage and clan rank among the highest castes of Bengal. The author says that Bengali society is organized into caste and clan group. The internal organization of these caste groups is very complex. As far as marriage rules are concerned, Bengalis follow the rule of ‘caste endogamy and gotra exogamy’. It also practice hypergamy, i.e., the bride is expected to be from the similar or higher caste status. The author has also mentioned that Marriage is considered compulsory for all in Bengali society and in traditional Bengali society, the practice of dowry was also prevalent which shows the low social position of women in the society.

While trying to appreciate the changes in social phenomenon and in the status of Bengali women, Bharati Debi (1988) in her study ‘Middle Class Working women of Calcutta’ has looked at women through the perspective of their work and specifically seeks to determine how they function as agents of tradition and change, as well as how continuity and change affect them. She interviewed 424 working women belonging to three occupational categories, namely teachers, office workers and technical personnel of Calcutta city. Information gathered through a partly structured and partly open-ended questionnaire have been analyzed and interpreted in three chapters of women at work, women at home and women at two situations. This book presents a fairly
intimate picture about transformation process that the status of women has undergone over the periods of history. According to the author, education as well as economic emancipation has positive association with status of women, since the former has influence upon the nature of gainful employment of women outside home. To what extent such exposures and consequent attainment of status could free women from their responsibilities at the domestic front is a very crucial issue that Dr. B. Debi dealt with quite extensively.

Manisha Roy (1993) offers a pioneering study of the lives of ‘Bengali women’ and also raises questions of comparison with women from similar socio-economic sections in other parts of India. Drawing on personal experiences and interviews with others, Manisha Roy explores the frustrations and rewards in the lives of Bengali women in upper and upper-middle class Hindu families. Roy also takes more of an external anthropological approach to her work, focusing more on recording and understanding patterns of behavior of women in their childhood and adolescence and adult life and analyzing and tracing the historical roots of the situations. She documents in great depth the expectations and realities involved with each of the dozens of relationships in a Bengali women’s life (with father, mother, husband, father-in-law, elder and younger brother-in-law, etc). She proceeds in a coronial manner,
presenting the story of the opposite Bengali woman, formed out of the expertise of her hundred and fifty interview subjects.

Roy has also discussed changes in Bengali society and culture over the last two decades which have direct bearings on women lives, divorce, breakdown of joint family, education, erosion of traditional religious practices and so on.

Ramkrishna Mukherjee (1977) in ‘West Bengal Family Structures 1946-66’ has mentioned that in Bengali society, the patrilineal-patrilocal joint family structure represents the static point. The author has also said that, the direction of change is towards the nuclearization of family structures. In recent times, brothers are found to form their respective families of procreation where women enjoy comparatively a respectable position in the family.

M. Borthwick (1984) in ‘Changing Role of Women in Bengal 1849-1905’ has mentioned that Bengalis always preferred to live in joint family where there was a high preference on males than on females. The author said that in traditional Bengali family, there were strict principles or code of conduct for women. Under strict principles, women were confined to the ‘antaphur’ (inner world) which was the center of the female world. There was well defined set of prescriptive roles which provided guidelines for harmonious living and for avoiding conflict that would upset the solidarity of the joint family. The book has also
mentioned about the contact of Bengal with different culture in the Colonial period which eventually has brought many changes in the Bengali society to a great extent.

M.M. Urquhart (1983) in her book ‘Women of Bengal’ has mentioned that Bengalis are caste conscious people. The author has discussed regarding strict seclusion of Bengali caste women. A Bengali woman is secluded from many of her male relatives in the family. The author has also said that a Bengali woman has a secondary status in the family in terms of relationships, property or other important matters. However, it is often said that behind the purdah, the power of women is supreme. But this is true only an in case of woman who happens to be the senior most female member of the family. The book has vividly discussed the life and position of women of Bengal.

Sophia Khan and Nasfin Haque (2004) talking from a male perspective says that, broadly speaking Bengali women have progressed; the extent of this progression is disputed. In this case of Bengali women there is certainly positive advancement. By advancement they mean advancement in two specific areas: education and employment. There are notably more Bengali girls going to University, their level of attainment has also increased over the years. Now more women are putting aside the traditional requirement to get married soon after the schooling age and deciding to opt for a career instead. She also says that,
some of her female respondents have assumed the role of breadwinner in their households. Thus, the author tries to make it clear that women have certainly challenged many attitudes towards the position of women in the family and in the larger society.

In part II, Nasfin Haque talks from a female perspective and says that the fundamental role of Bengali woman within the family has not changed at all. Although, over the years, we have seen a rise in the value of their education and encouragement towards employment and career development, but ultimately, there is a great duty for the women, once come of age, to marry and settle down and bear children at least by the time, she is 30 years of age. There is still a gap between the legal rights women hold in Bengali Society and the actual practice.

Malabika Karlekar (1986) in her study “Voices from women: Early Personal Narratives of Bengali women” has traced the broad patterns of Bengali women’s lives from about 1850-1915. She discussed the changing roles of middle class Bengali women in society in the latter half of the 19th and very early 20th centuries. Karlekar draws heavily upon personal narrative as a vehicle for her exploration. She begins her exploration by taking on the traditional culture of the ‘antaphur’ (women’s inner domestic quarter) and also about the social practices like child marriage and polygamy.
Karlekar then turns from the relatively static conditions of the past, to the influence of increasing Europeanization of Bengali customs brought out by the strong British preserve in Calcutta. She traces the matrix of reform movements attempting to improve the lives of women and society. ‘Voices from within’, thus traces the modernization of gender roles for Bengali women.

In an article from *EPW* ‘Women’s Employment and the household- some findings from Calcutta’ (Vol. XXIII, issue 18, 1988); Hilary standing and Bela Banerjee, describes same aspects of the effects of women’s entry into waged employment at the urban Bengali household. The result points out the increase in the participation of women in profitable enterprises and the consequences that follow from it in the family life. Their study aims at an interesting test for examining the relationship between women’s labour free participation and their changing position in the household. Some of the questions raised during their field study are:

1) What motivates women to enter the labour force?

2) To what extent is her income essential to the economic survival of the household?

3) How women’s wages are used in the family?

4) What control do female earners have over their wages?
5) Does women’s employment modify existing power relation in the family?

The report also shows that there is also a strong tendency for women to be restricted to teaching and public sector clerical jobs. Teaching is considered to be the only or most honorable occupation for women in Bengali society.

Komal Gandhar (2006) in his book ‘Partition and the empowerment of Bengali Women’ has mainly focused on the partition of Bengal and its impact on the Bengali women. According to him, women were the worst sufferer of the event of Partition. They were raped, abducted, forcibly married in a large scale. However, the partition brought about some positive impacts on their lives and attitudes as well. He has mentioned that, forced by the circumstances, Bengali women, mainly those from refugee background had to take up various jobs to support their families. This exposure to the outer world brought about some fundamental changes in the attitudes of Bengali women. He also said that, economic independence made them self conscious and confident enough to fight against patriarchy. The process of women’s empowerment got a momentum in the Post-Independent Bengali society. It was also reflected in their active participation in the
decision making process within their respective families as well as public affairs.

M. Dutta in an article “Women’s power and authority within middle class households in Kolkata’ (Contemporary South Asian Journal, Vol II, No.1, 2002) examines gender equality within families of urban middle-class Bengali women in Kolkata. The study shows that some equality and consultation between wives and husband in the exercise of domestic authority has emerged in the families of middle class Bengali women as a consequence of the increasing commonness of paid employment among educated women. Another contributing factor to the shift in the authority pattern has been a change in the approach taken by husbands to domestic roles. However, although paid employment appears to have slightly increased, the total equality of power between husband and wives is yet to be realized. Husbands still tend to retain the final say in major domestic decisions.

Survey of Vernacular Books:

Sarada Manjari Dutta (1948) in her study ‘Mahajatra Pathe (The Ultimate Journey)’ narrates author’s own period life in a chronological order i.e., from childhood age and tries to reflect the life of a Bengali woman in her family, her duties and obligations towards others. It also largely describes the importance of religion in the life of a Bengali man.
and woman and the role of woman used to be dictated by religion. Traditionally, Bengali Society was very conservative in the sense that, free interaction between boys and girls were not allowed and in most of the families, the male teacher was not allowed to impart education to girls. She has mentioned that, marriage was compulsory for Bengali girls in traditional Bengali family. While talking about power structure in the family, she says Bengali families were traditionally joint and the decision of the grand-father or grand-mother was taken as final decision. Author in her study mentions her own life when she arrived in Shillong in 1872 with her husband. This work also reflects the efforts done by the author herself along with other active members to popularize education among girls in Shillong.

Nabanita Debsen (1996) in her work ‘Sita Theke Suru’ (Starting from Sita) mentions the condition of women right from ancient phase where she was given the example of Sita who used to think her husband ‘Ram’ as God without whom she had no existence. The condition of women was too miserable in the family and she had no ‘say’ in the family decision making. Again, the author has given the example of modern period where she has tried to show the changes through different short stories. In modern period, women are educated and they think freely about their career and their family. In short, this book depicts the life of women from the early period till the modern age.
Shyamaldas Bhattacharyya (1996) in his book ‘Shillonger Bangali’ drives us through the 120 years history of the Bengalis in the city of Shillong. This is a voluminous book written by one who has lived in the deep of the changing socio-economic situation of the Bengalis of this hill state. The book contains a detailed account of the societal documentation. The author says that the Bengalis came to Shillong for Government service and business purposes. They played an important role in the socio-economic development of the city. They also played a very important role in the establishment of many educational institutions in the city. The author has also mentioned about the role of Bengali women in the establishment educational institutions in the city.

Thus, there are many sociological studies on women belonging to various cultures, religions, communities in India. These studies indicate that there are certainly some kinds of transformation which is taking place in the position of women in the family. Exposure of the women to formal education has enabled them to enter into remunerative occupations in increasing number. Women are gradually realizing that they have personalities of their own as human beings and their mission doesn’t end with only becoming good wives and wise mothers but also realizing that they are all members of the civic community. This change in the attitude, expectation and behaviour of women is a healthy
indication of a situation which may motivate them further to realize their skills in family decision making, which has been the prerogative of men till recent times.

**Statement of the Problem:**

Women’s lives are deeply embedded in the household and family. Their position cannot be analyzed outside of this primary reference point. Decision making is an important aspect of determining the position of women within the family. The present work intends to examine the impact of education and employment of Bengali women on decision making power in the family. In other words, the purpose of the study is to explore to which extent, a Bengali wife’s education and employment has enabled her to share power along with her husband in family decision making process. It has been found out from various studies that, the newly achieved economic status particularly by urban middle class women, has contributed to their legitimate overt assertion of authority in family decisions. Moreover, contribution by women to family economy has helped to bring a smooth relationship between marriage partners. It is felt that, there is a need for a detailed study on the process of decision making in Bengali family along with participation level of Bengali women in family decision making which would help us in conceptual clarification of status of Bengali women in
family and also help us to understand the changes, if any, emerging in
decision making process of Bengali family with particular reference to
Shillong.

In the present study, the term ‘educated working women’ means
married women who have received minimum education up to higher
secondary level and are engaged in gainful employment. Here
employment has been taken as the vital factor in evaluating the status of
women regarding their decision making power in family. The study also
give emphasis on the attitude of family members towards participation
of women in decision making, extent of influence that women have on
other family members and in execution of decisions.

**Objectives of the Study:**

1. To understand the process of decision making in the Bengali
   family.
2. To understand the extent of participation of educated employed
   married women in different areas of decision making in the
   family.
3. To understand the extent to which her opinion influence execution
   of decisions.
Area and Milieu under study:

For the present study, Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya has been selected. It is the headquarter Of the East Khasi Hills district. As of 2011 India census, Shillong city has population of 143,007 of which male and female are 70,028 and 72,979 respectively. Khasis constitute the majority of population. However, people of other communities such as Bengali, Nepali, Assamese, Biharis and Marwaries also reside here making it a fairly cosmopolitan city. The Bengalis came to Shillong with the shifting of the headquarters from Cherrapunjee in 1864. Most of the Bengalis were from Sylhet district of East Bengal. A large majority of them also came from Hooghly district of West Bengal. In Shillong Bengalis are largely associated with establishment of schools and colleges and mostly employed in government services.

Methodology:

Sample: The Bengali people are largely from the historic region of Bengal (now divided between Bangladesh and India). They speak Bengali (Bangla) which is an Indo- Aryan Language of the Eastern Indian Sub- continent, evolved from the Magadhi Prakit and Sanskrit languages.

Although the universe of the study is Bengali society at large, the study mainly focuses on educated Bengali working women of Shillong.
The sample comprises of 150 respondents drawn from two occupational categories namely teachers and office workers as these categories constitute the major bulk of occupational category in the city.

In the absence of any official data regarding the number of working women, it was decided to collect the names of educated working women from various government offices and colleges of the city. The samples were selected through purposive sampling method and only educated married women were chosen for the present study in order to understand their role in family decision making process. Here, it must be mentioned that, purposive sampling, one of the types of non-probability sampling, is very useful for situations where we need to reach a targeted sample quickly. In this method the subjects are selected because of some characteristics.

To be eligible for inclusion in the sample, the working women were expected to have the following characteristics:

- Should be married for not less than a year.
- Should not be a widow.
- Should have been in service for not less than a year.
- Should be in the age group of 25-60.
- Their husbands should also be economically active.
Method of data collection:

The nature of the study was exploratory and descriptive. The researcher being a member of the community under study, collected primary sources of data based upon structured questionnaire. The whole questionnaire was divided into following sections-

A) General information of the respondents.
B) The process of decision-making in Bengali family.
C) Participation of women in different areas of family decision making.
D) Extent of influence that women exercise on other family members
E) Opinion of women regarding the nature of their family

The researcher had to conduct personal interviews with the respondents as all necessary information could not be elicited through formal questionnaire. Information related to the study was also collected from secondary sources. The main sources of secondary data include vernacular books and magazines, published and unpublished documents, books, journals and research paper of sociological nature.

Field work was conducted in two phases. The first phase began in the month of August, 2010 with mainly pilot survey and pre-testing of the tools of data collection, which enabled the researcher to find out the flaws, handicaps and inappropriate questions. Both open and close ended questions were included in the questionnaire. After the pre-testing, some
of the inappropriate questions were dropped and a few more questions were added according to the suggestions received from the respondents. The second phase of field work began in the month of March, 2011. In this phase, the respondents were given the questionnaires and while giving questionnaires, every question was explained to them and the researcher requested the respondents to provide answers for all the questions as it would help the researcher to reach to a particular conclusion.

Field Experience: It must be mentioned that, during the field work, most of the respondents were approachable and polite and after an initial explanation about the study, they readily agreed to give the information. The researcher explained the objectives of the study and they were assured that the information provided by them would be kept confidential and used only for academic purpose. In some cases, it was only after repeated visit to the work places of the respondents that the researcher could receive the filled up questionnaires. On the whole, researcher’s field experience had been quite a pleasant and learning one.
Tentative Chapterisation:

The body of thesis is divided into following chapters-

Chapter I: *Introduction*.

This chapter begins with a brief account of the status of Indian women in general, certain conceptual definitions, statement of the problem, survey of literature, objectives of the study and methodology of study.

Chapter II: *Decision making processes in Bengali family*.

This chapter provides firstly, *a socio-cultural profile of Bengali society*, highlighting the traditional way of life of Bengali women. A survey of literature was carried out and on the basis of available data a *brief account of the Bengali community of Shillong* was given. The *socio-economic background of the educated Bengali working women of Shillong* has been included in this chapter. Last but not least, the *power structure of the Bengali family and the position of women in decision making process of family* have also been given in this chapter.

Chapter III: *The working women’s participation in different areas of family decision making*.

This chapter is based on fieldwork. It provides information on participation of educated Bengali working women in different areas of family decision making such as family budgeting, schooling of children,
career and marriage of children, purchase of food items, purchase of property, decision on family planning and others.

Chapter IV: *The working women’s power to influence in family decision making.*

In the first part of this chapter, an attempt was made to assess *the influence of Bengali working women in different areas of decision making*. The second part deals with *the opinion of working women regarding the attitude of family members towards their participation in family decision making*. Third part emphasizes on *opinion of working women towards the nature of their family*.

Chapter V: *Conclusion.*

In concluding chapter, the major findings of the study are discussed and summarized.