CHAPTER V

AUTHORITY STRUCTURE IN THE FAMILY

This chapter deals with an important issue of defining and understanding the authority structure in the family with special emphasis on the husband-wife relationship. It also deals with the avoidance patterns in the family which throws light on the authority structure.

Even in a small group as family right and duties and authority in different spheres should be defined for its efficient functioning. As Parsons says,

"The order underlying a system of traditional authority always defines a system of statuses of persons who can legitimately exercise authority. Such a status is different from an "office". It does not involve specifically defined powers with the presumption that everything not legitimised in terms of the order is outside its scope. It is rather defined in terms of...the concrete traditional prescriptions of the traditional order, which are held to be binding on the person in authority as well as the others. There is also the authority of other persons above the particular status in a hierarchy or in different spheres, and finally...there is a sphere of arbitrary free "grace" open to the incumbent" (Parsons and Henderson 1967: 60-1).

A point which should be clarified at this juncture is that the father and mother were not interviewed together but there was substantial agreement on issues being discussed. Whenever in any family there was no consensus regarding the issues being focussed upon, then the cases are cited in the text at appropriate points.
The discussion of this theme is of importance because it helps us to understand the unconscious role models being provided to the boys and girls and the family sets the stage for their socialisation. Most of the anticipatory socialization for their future roles of husband and wife will be structured on this unconscious training that the young incumbents are provided. Therefore at various junctures we are showing the importance of the family as an agency of socialisation.

The major pointers through which the authority structure was conceptualised was by observing, and by questioning the husband and wife on these statements namely: "Do you feel authority in the family should be with the husband, wife or with both? The second statement, closely similar, was "Do you think the major decisions should be carried out by the husband, wife or by both"? The third aspect of this was to identify the spheres of decision making between husband and wife - where wife could use her discretion and the spheres where only males had the final authority.

As the tables 16 and 17 discuss related issues, the general discussions which follows is based on the data presented in them.

The respondents did not even distinguish between the two issues and therefore their responses to the questions are exactly the same.
Table 16: AUTHORITY STRUCTURE AS ASSOCIATED WITH DIFFERENT OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS
(Viewpoint of Both Husband and Wife)

(Figures are given in percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authority in all matters</th>
<th>Clerks</th>
<th>Traders</th>
<th>Sailors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wife N=50</td>
<td>Husband N=50</td>
<td>Wife N=50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Should lie with the husband</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Should lie with the wife</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Should lie with both</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 100 100 100 100 100 100

Table 17: DECISION MAKING AS ASSOCIATED WITH DIFFERENT OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS

(Figures are given in percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generally decision making</th>
<th>Clerks</th>
<th>Traders</th>
<th>Sailors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wife N=50</td>
<td>Husband N=50</td>
<td>Wife N=50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Should lie with the husband</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Should lie with the wife</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Should lie with both</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 100 100 100 100 100 100
The answers to these queries showed the authority structure and decision making emphasised the role of the male, though some variations across occupational groups were observed. Not surprisingly, in the entire sample not a single individual responded to item 2 of the table 16 and 17. In fact authority or decisions making was not even thought of as the women's prerogative.

Another reason could be that none of the women in the sample are highly educated to perceive or fight for their rights in a patriarchal society like ours. Even though legally the women have been given rights most of them are not even aware of their legal rights. The general picture is the same for all the occupational groups, the inter group differences can be summed up only in terms of differential amount of rights being provided to the women in the different settings.

A large number of them have not even thought of the fact that they were unhappy. Or that they should demand more rights and should be able to assert themselves. Or whether they should have a greater authority in their homes - on their children, and on their husbands.

Even in families where women are working, generally, the values of the "bharitiya nari", (the ideal Hindu women) are so deeply embedded through social conditioning that to spend their earnings without prior permission is unthinkable. To question the husband, or to go against his wishes is deeply frowned upon and to support their actions the reasoning given by some of them is quite convincing.
A wife in one of the families, Case 9, (clerks) Mrs. T., voiced that, "if wives did not listen and argued on every point with the husband, it would create tensions and conflicts in the household which would adversely affect the growth of the children, their mental development. They had no way out but to listen to their husbands and tolerate their whims. The only course of action possible is to make the best out of the available situation and that too with a smile".

Similar findings are reported by others. "...the traditional outlook on the husband-wife relationships is still so strong in India that it may be long before the more equalitarian ideal becomes part of the "natural" expectations of marriage" (Ross 1973: 107).

The wives of clerks as compared to the other wives had some equality with their husbands therefore the largest number believed that authority should be shared and decisions be made jointly.

The clerks seem to accord a better status to their wives; they at least try to give them some right in decision making and in controlling the finances in the family. The help patterns are also such that when the workload on the wife/mother is more they make an effort in looking after the home and the children.

The factors which contribute to this seem to be urban background, of both husband & wife, better education of both the partners, high incidence of self employed or working wives and living in nuclear family structures. The last factor is important because the husbands are away from their own parents and elders who consider it quite derogatory for the males to help in household chores, and looking after the children. Similarly the elders invariably
reinforce the idea of the traditional division of labour between the sexes, and the belief that only the men should formulate all decisions, and should control the finances. In one of the families there was no consensus regarding in whom the authority should be vested — whether in the husband or in the wife. This formed an interesting illustration of the points being discussed. This was the only visible case of this kind in the entire sample.

Case 5, Mrs. A. (clerks) provides a typical illustration of how the husband is against the idea that the wife should be vested with authority. In this family there was a total clash of values and attitudes. Furthermore she is a working woman, trained as a teacher. Mrs. A. narrated that in her family, she was socialised in a manner where girls are treated at par with the males of the family. A strong Arya Samaj training was provided, where materialistic things were not of any importance. On the contrary in the husband's family, money and materialistic things were given importance. Women were not given any status in the husbands family. All these factors lead to a clash of values between the husband and wife. This was further aggravated by living in the joint family. This case illustrates how conflicts arose when the values and attitudes of husband and wife were completely divergent. However, the wife tried to see that this tension in the family did not adversely affect the socialisation of the children. She further believed that whenever the men of the family were extremely dominant, tension and conflict were bound to prevail.

This factor of differing expectations of husband and wife towards each others values, attitudes and roles caused a great
discontentment in the family. This discontentment, clash of attitudes, disparity of role expectations etc., was aggravated due to the presence of elders.

Ross’s (1973) observations further help in explaining this.

"When industrialisation affects the structure of the joint family and it breaks down into a single family unit, the relationship between husband and wife undergoes a major change. The wife gains a position of more importance because she is older when married, typically has more education, and there are no elders in positions of authority over her. Moreover if the wife grows up in a nuclear family she will be more accustomed to equalitarian relations between husband and wives, and will tend to expect them in her own marriage” (Ross 1973: 107).

In this case however the expected change has not come about, but the expectations of the wife are similar to what Ross has explained. Thus the change in the expected direction is yet to occur.

It is observed that the dominant position in all the household affairs in the sailors and traders falls to the males. The males are not only encouraged to dominate on the females but it is considered their right to exercise power over their mothers, sisters, and wives. This pattern is followed even when the males grow up and start their own families. Consequently, their wives are the target of this dominant pattern of behaviour.

In cases where the woman were living in the joint families which was mostly the case in the traders families and in the Sailors families (Refer to Table 15 Family Structures among the Different Occupational Groups), the subservience to the husbands relatives was quite obvious. Though in the case of the sailors families living

---

3. For more details on this refer to section on Socialisation of Boys and Girls.
with in-laws came into force only when the husband was away on a course, or when an accommodation problem existed.

The younger women were often insulted by the elder women in the family and it was considered quite disrespectful for her to talk back. If the daughter-in-law did not conform she would be thoroughly reprimanded by the husband. For example, if some wife had the courage to answer back the elders she would be the object of her husband's rage. And if she often repeated this the relations with her were severed, by the husband's family, and in an extreme case with her husband. This was stated by one of the respondents. She added that even if her husband was aware of his mother's mistake, he would be expected to keep quiet lest he be given the label of being a henpecked husband. Case 1, (sailors) Mrs. G.S. often pointed this out in the course of the interview. Mrs. R.S. Case 3 (sailors) pointed out that even though she had been married for a long time (14 years), she still never used to talk to her father-in-law and would also cover her head in his presence, and never answer him back.

Case 1, Mrs. G.S. (sailors) further gave an illustration. "Whenever we go to the husband's parents home during the annual leave or on different occasions when the family was 'despatched' (a term often used by the husband) home, there would be nobody to serve them tea or anything. We had to look after ourselves, even after travelling such a distance". This was cited by her in order to show how she and her children were treated by the in-laws. Further she narrated how in the family if there was a discussion, or a quarrel regarding some general daily routine work, the husband would often
tell her "you should not reply, if my mother tells you anything you
should quietly accept."

These were some of the general expectations from their
daughters-in-law. However it was also stated that this was the case
when the daughter-in-law was young and new to the house. But with
time this brunt of insults shifted to the younger daughters-in-law.
The daughters in the family are trained to bear this brunt. (Discussed
in Socialisation of Boys and Girls).

After discussing some aspects of decision making it was thought
esential to study the ways and means by which the husband/wife
control the family finances.

Table 18: CONTROL OF FINANCES AS ASSOCIATED WITH
DIFFERENT OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control of Finance and the Family Purse Strings</th>
<th>Clerks N=50</th>
<th>Traders N=50</th>
<th>Sailors N=50</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Should lie with the husband</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Should lie with the wife</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Should lie with both</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of finances, money matters, the same patterns are
almost repeated. Equal rights are at least theoretically provided
to their wives by 72% of the clerks. The proportion decreases as
we move on to traders and to sailors.
In those cases of clerks where the wife was working, the income of the husband and wife was jointly utilised for the needs of the family. The funds were fully controlled by the husbands. Of course, the amount of clothes the working women would buy were comparatively more because the needs were more. Some of the income the wives earned was spent in buying certain items for the family, but even for this the husbands expected that they should be informed of these.

However, these are some aspects of the 'ideal patterns' which the husbands expect their wives to follow. Sometimes, the wives save something from the money given by their husbands for running the house to buy things they desire. When the husbands find out about this, the wife would say that "her parents had given them, or her brother had presented it to her". If on the contrary she had bought something for the home she would tactfully tell him that she had bought it from the money given to her for house expenditure. Illustrations of spending of this kind were narrated by some of the wives of sailors, clerks and traders in the sample. When asked regarding their reactions to these styles of expenditure, husbands, for example in Case 1, Mr. G. S. (sailors) felt quite happy that his wife was so economical as to save from whatever little he used to give her. But it must be remembered that only when she bought something for the home it was appreciated and if she bought something for herself she would usually say that her parents had given it to her. This pattern of behaviour is common to all the occupational groups.

The wives of traders were given a fixed amount of money to run the house. The wives opined that this was just enough to manage
the general consumption needs. But even here the wives could resort
to buying certain items they desired giving explanations similar to
those provided by the wives of clerks and sailors. At times the
husbands would hand over large sums of money to their wives which
was either for investment or for other business dealings but never
for personal use.

In all the three occupational groups generally a wife could
buy something only when the husbands felt that their wives needed
particular items or when she herself expressed a need. This is not
a form of suppression but it is resorted to because there is never
too much money to be extravagant.

These were some of the ways in which the families utilised
the money earned by the husband, or husband and wife. The overall
control remains with the husband. Since he is the major bread
winner.

After delineating the general ideas on authority structure,
it was felt necessary to study the spheres of decision making of
the two sexes. Generally it was observed that even in matters which
were of interest to husband and wife, the one who is equipped by
education or training decided the course of action. This was true
of all the occupational groups. For example, Cases 7, 8 (Clerks)
the father decided the type of education - professional, technical
etc. - the son or daughter should undergo. Alternatively whether
or not the son/daughter should stop education and join as a clerk
somewhere is also a decision left to the father. The wives believed
that in these spheres their husbands knew much more, were more
knowledgeable. Consequently, there was no cause of conflicts even if decision is taken without discussion in these matters.

On the contrary, in matters of child care the mothers made the decisions. For example, whenever there was any problem with the health of the child it was they who decided the mode of handling this problem whether they should use some home tried methods, or whether a doctor should be consulted.

The spheres of decision making are quite well differentiated between the sexes - the father and mother in this case. This is attributed to the socialisation training they have received as children where the sex roles are clearly defined and each is specialised in performing his own role. For example the fathers are quite clear that child care, handling children's day to day physical problems properly etc., falls in the mother's ken and he as the father does not have a very important role to play in this.

Disciplining the son and daughter when they go out of control and the methods to be used etc., very much fall in the father's domain. Similarly to see that a growing daughter behaves 'properly' was the mother's task. If the daughter did not behave in the expected manner and the mother was unable to make her conform only then the father would take over.

The disciplining of the son as he grows up was considered by the parents to be the role of the father. Whereas the disciplining of the daughter or to see that she is adequately trained to play her future roles - of daughter-in-law, wife-mother etc., - is the responsibility of the mother.

4. For details of this, refer to section on Socialisation of Boys and Girls.
The men felt that they were competent enough to take decisions in their own spheres and women in theirs. Both the sexes felt they could manage quite well in their respective spheres.

In a family, an elderly wife, (Case 5, traders) Mrs. B.D., very succinctly commented that "it is not that we have no power, we do not have the right to decide anything, but it is just that it is always the man who has to make the most important decisions because they actually know more. Also it depends on how tactfully we deal with our husbands. She further added in a confidential tone, "You are asking about right to move about freely, where is the need to move about. Also ultimately the men do what we like, what we want, only we should convey our idea tactfully. Like young educated women we should not say that this is our right or that is our right but just very calmly we should present our view". Thus it was the personality of the women also which decided to some extent the authority structure.

But in some other families the mothers were quite dominating, as is shown by Ross:

"...Her traditional role of dominance in the domestic aspect of family life has not been as publicised in literature and lore as the father's position as head of the family. But her position as consultant meant in reality that in most families she shared the responsibility of making the major family decisions" (Ross 1973: 102).

Avoidance Patterns

Most of the women belonging to the sailors families observed 'Purdah' from their elder relatives — viz. mother-in-law, father-in-law, husband's elder brother, and other elder relatives. With father-in-law some of them did not even converse, some did not talk to others in his presence.
At the time of the visits to one of the families the father-in-law was present and even when he was to be asked for tea, one of the children at home was sent to ask the father-in-law. The women maintain total avoidance with the elder male relatives of the husband's family.

It was never anticipated that such traditional ideas would be so strictly adhered to. Consequently, the point was probed into in regard to all the families of this occupational group. It was observed that 85% of the wives practised avoidance from the husband's relatives, especially with the father-in-law. When asked about the reasoning behind this behaviour, some of them could not provide the reasons but a common answer was "Since we have observed our mothers doing this throughout our lives we know that this is what we have to do".

A small percentage of the mothers recognised that it was a form of respect given to the elder person, furthermore it ensured that even if the father-in-law said something to the daughter-in-law which she did not like, since she could not reply, she could not express her view, dislike, she would quietly listen without answering. Talking back to the elder was the greatest mark of disrespect the daughter-in-law could show. It was anticipated that in sailors the adherence to these customs would be minimal (because of husband's occupation) and they would be fast changing. But contrary to expectations, the traditional customs were strictly followed. The strict adherence to customs could be explained in terms of the values internalized at an early age. Even though the husbands may be going abroad on cruises, performing modern occupations, even though they may
be coming in contact with different people and therefore with different set of values, those values internalized in childhood are very difficult to erode.

This could be illustrated with reference to one of the families, Case 3, Mr. R. Shanti who claimed, "that even if we are working in the navy our eating habits have remained the same, we have never tasted so many food items which are available to us". This fact of traditional attitudes is further being supported in various other fields under investigation too. (See table 36)

In the form of adherence to the traditional customs among clerks, it was normal for the wife to cover her head, but as time passed, she would be less strict in following this pattern and usually they were living in nuclear families.

In the case of traders the same pattern was followed, this was observed whenever the families were joint in form but, the compliance was not in terms of total avoidance. This could be attributed to urban living and a slow change in attitudes and values regarding avoidance.

This aspect reveals recognition of the authority to the head of the joint family who is not only the father-in-law, but also the controller of the family business. The case of sailors families who are from the land owning groups is similar. The father-in-law is also the owner of the landed property, therefore the ruler and the dominant figure of the household. In order to achieve harmony between the husband and his family this avoidance is practised. In the clerical group, each son is a breadwinner whose economic condition and well being is not determined by being on good terms with his father and mother. The father-in-law is
therefore not such a strict dominant authoritarian figure whose word is to be taken as law. In sailors even though the men are the bread winners they are also the land owning group of the Punjab. In the case of clerks, the parents do not have much property, or land which may not be given to the sons if the proper relations are not maintained. Another reason could be that urban living and urban background causes some traditional ideas to get eroded with time.

In traders also the family business may be jointly owned by the head of the family and his word is taken as law but due to urban living some of the attitudes regarding this aspect are showing slight directions towards change.