CHAPTER - I
INTRODUCTION

Women form almost half of the world's population and have played a major role in the development of civilisation, yet their social status has never been commensurate with their contribution. Some of the statistics concerning them are quite revealing. Almost two billion people are considered poor in the world and two-third of them are women (ESCAP, 2002). Women are doing more hours of work than men but earn little because sixty per cent of the total unpaid work is done by them (UN 2007). But despite their hard work, women possess only one per cent of the world's total assets in their name. The gendered nature of their relatively poor socio-economic status aggravated by several other social factors puts them at a serious disadvantage both within and outside the household and is best indicated by their inability to take important decisions in personal and social matters. This has been the subject of study from different angles under different nomenclatures such as Women's Empowerment, Developmental Economics, Society and Consumer Economics etc.

It is against this background that the present research topic has been taken up. Though "Women in Household Decision Making in Punjab" addresses the issue at micro level i.e. the family unit, it has wide-ranging implications in the larger social and economic context and reveals the truth about our affirmed social goal of gender equality. The hierarchical structure of any social institution is essentially defined by the access to power of decision making which, in turn, emanates primarily by the degree of control over material resources. The decision making power of women is thus an index of their participation in fulfilment of our egalitarian ideals. The study also brings out the lag between our declared goal and actual performance as it shows that human development does not always keep pace with
economic development. It underlines the importance of social and distributive justice in this age of fast paced economic and material development.

It is also a fact that in almost all the cultures, especially our own, a number of myths have been woven around women in which they have been both deified and reviled and the social norms are heavily loaded against them. In elementary structure of kinship, Levi Strauss wrote that "The first problem of mythic thought is that women must be domesticated" (Adrienne, 1980). Further, Susan Brown Miller observes talent, ability and intellectual promise integrate uneasily with a feminine ideal romantically connected to in superior accomplishments of the husband. Such cultural factors are also significant in perpetuating the myth of their inferiority. But the new culture of crass consumerism where woman's representation is highly co modified is also open to question. It also needs to be considered whether gendered inequality can be studied in the perspective of general class inequalities or it forms a part of some new emerging social hierarchies and power structures.

The household decision making power of women can have multiple ramifications in the wider social context. The areas of decision making themselves vary greatly in their importance, some of them being really decisive. In fact, control over finances and privatization of different heads of expenditure is the key point which is indicative of decision making power in the real sense: other areas of decision are only of secondary or tertiary importance in the context of household economy.

All this has been dealt with in this dissertation so as to assess the reality of women's empowerment which is increasingly being incorporated as a cardinal principle in most of our policies and programmes.
1.1 THEORETICAL BASIS FOR STUDYING THE HOUSEHOLD DECISION MAKING

There are two prominent approaches to the theories of household behaviour in the literature: Sociological approach and Economics approach. Within this broader categorisation there are further differences in the treatment of the subject.

**The Sociological Approach:**

From theoretical perspective most common approaches are the resource theory (Blood and Wolf, 1960) and social power theory (Raven, Centers and Rodrigues, 1975). According to the resource theory, the individual's personal resources relative to others are the basis for power. Relative income, education, available time and social status are the factors that contribute to power. Thus, male dominant families of the earlier 20th century and prior were a result of the fact that the husband was more likely to be the sole worker outside of the home and had higher status within the household. This was a result of his social status, relative income, and most often higher education. Two of the primary factors leading to an increase in influence of women within the family, from 1950’s onwards, were the fact that they were now being employed outside home as well as getting better education. As women became more educated and provided more income to the family on a relative basis, the more egalitarian the decision making process became within the household.

Raven, Centers and Rodrigues (1975) examined the basis of conjugal power from the perspective of social power theory. One of the bases of household decision making is expert power. According to them, expert power is the belief that one family member has superior knowledge or ability which will result in the best possible outcome as far as the family decision making is concerned. In turn, the attribution of expert power was shown to increase with education and social class.
**Approach based on Economic theory:**

Since household is an important unit of consumption and production, economists have tried to understand how the household functions and have propounded various theories to explain the household decision making process. Primarily there are three strands to this theoretical treatment of the household decision making process: Exploitation, Altruism or Unitary, and Bargaining.

**\(\textit{a})\) Exploitation Theory**

This type of household behaviour is based on the theory that self interest is the dominant aspect. A single individual, typically the head of the family which is usually the husband, dictates his choices or preferences to other members of the household. Since the overriding emotion is furthering of self interest, these choices are often made at the cost of the other family members. This leads to exploitation of family members by the household head. Here the family members do not have control over any household resources. All the decisions regarding allocation of household resources are made by the household head. The household head derives the authority to make all the decisions from the socio-cultural norms established by traditional patriarchal society. In such households women are dependent on household head and are expected to perform certain labour and household obligations which are often non-remunerative. In return their basic needs are fulfilled by the household head. A refusal on part of the women to conform to this set-up creates conflict within the family. But social pressures are such that it curbs rebellion on part of the women. The household head also faces certain forms of social pressure. He is responsible for providing the basic needs of the household members and negligence on his part may result in loss of social status. The social pressures thus, maintain the status quo as sanctioned by the socio-cultural norms of the patriarchal society. In the male dominated societies these social pressures work to great
disadvantage of women and they are exceedingly left out of the decision making process of the household.

Subsuming patriarchal institutions and practices under an oppressor/oppressed model which theorises men as possessing and wielding power over women-who are viewed correspondingly as themselves utterly powerless-proved inadequate to the social and historical complexities of the situations of men and women and many different foci of criticism emerged in the 1980s and 1990s (Susan 2003). In fact, in the case of a close knit unit such as a household it would seem that this paradigm is not the most suitable explanation; as within the household the members are often more affectionate than being antagonistic.

(b) Altruistic /Unitary model

Normally contrasted with egoism and individualism, altruism is the principal of unselfish regard for the needs and interests of others (The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology 2006). Unitary model assumes that the household head is not only interested in maximising his own utility but, is also interested in the welfare of the family members. This approach conceptualizes the household head as a benevolent dictator. He is the sole decision maker in the household, but his decisions are tempered by the altruistic urges, which make him considerate towards the needs of other household members. This approach based on altruism obscures any conflicts and separate interests that may exist within the household (Sen 1990). This framework treats household as a single production or consumption unit. This simply assumes away all the dynamics of decision making within the household. Such a framework leaves no scope for studying the role of individuals in the household decision making process and does not reflect true reality of the household.
(c) Bargaining Theory

Social scientists have long asserted that even within the patriarchal household significant differences between the economic position of household members, based on gender and age exist (Blumburg and Coleman 1989; Seiz 1995). They criticize the unitary approach to household decision making and contend that households cannot be treated as homogeneous units. The reality of differing opinions within the household and status of various household members must be acknowledged. The way a person is positioned in structures is as much a function of how other people treat him or her within various institutional settings as of the attitude a person takes to himself or herself. Any individual occupies multiple positions in structures, and these postings become differently silent depending on the institutional setting and the position of others there (Young, 2005).

There is variety of circumstances under which unitary/altruistic model fails. A general consensus amongst scholars is that unitary model typically fails to explain household decisions, as relative bargaining power of the household member and other factors within the household frequently affect the outcomes of household decisions. Further, given the evidence of discrimination against women in terms of access to food, education, land and other inputs and long working hours, it is hard to justify the altruistic/unitary model based in the benevolent dictator theory.

The game theory extends the theory of rational individual action to situations of interdependence or social interaction; that is where two or more individuals do not act independently but interact and are mutually dependent (The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology 2006). Recent development in game theory, increasing inter-disciplinary studies and focus on gender issues, has led the scholars to study the household decision making from the aspect of bargaining framework. This framework assumes that preferences vary among family members
and views bargaining between family members as a process that reconciles these differences in preferences. Here, two parties have several possible options available to them. Each has an interest in reaching a settlement but their preferences/choices are not identical. The bargaining framework assumes that parties behave rationally and try to reach a settlement.

The bargaining process involves power relationship between the bargaining parties. Therefore, while studying household bargaining the idea of women empowerment at the household level comes up for analysis. The idea is that if household decisions are a result of *inter se* bargaining between the household members, then those household members who enjoy more privileges or power are likely to prevail in this bargaining process. Thus by studying the household decision making one can gauge the relative level of women empowerment at the household level, by assessing the extent of women’s ‘say’ in various household decisions.

The evolution of household decision making and its pace are determined by existing social norms and the economic position of women. Social norms and customs often dictate attitudes towards gender issues, the educational attainment and labour force participation rates of women (Aggarwal 1997). These above said factors in turn influence women’s status in the society. This power hierarchy gets reflected within the household as well.

The progressive societies, with relatively better education and work opportunities for women witness more egalitarian households, with women having significant ‘say’ in the household decision making. Whereas, in conservative and patriarchal societies, women have diminished social status and same gets translated into marginal ‘say’ of women in household decision making.

The bargaining model of household decision making can consistently explain the evolution of household decision making. Studies conducted in both developed (Ott 1992) and developing
countries (Braun and Webb 1989; Jones 1983) indicate bargaining as the predominant type of household decision making process.

1.2 WOMEN IN HOUSEHOLD DECISION MAKING AND THE ASPECT OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment is an abstract entity, incapable of direct measurement. Empowerment is conceptualized as effective role in decision making and its implementation. Thus when we study women's role in household decision making we are indirectly measuring women empowerment at the household level.

Now a question may arise why we need to study the women empowerment at the household level, an institution which is essentially a private domain. An argument can be made that it would be better to study the women role in decision making process involving public institutions such as legislature and government departments.

Firstly, it is true that women may be involved in decision making role in various settings involving varied institutions of state such as government departments, legislatives etc.. But it is a fact that women representation in the above said institutions is minuscule; rather there is one social institution ”the household” where women are almost equally represented as compared to their male counterparts. So, it is most appropriate to study women's role in decision making within the household to gauge their relative empowerment. Secondly, given the centrality of the household to gender relations, it is quite appropriate that household decision making and it analysis has received maximum attention while studying women empowerment.

Thirdly, the relational nature of empowerment is critical. People are not empowered or disempowered in a vacuum. Rather, they are empowered relative to other people or groups whose lives intersect with their own lives. Being the arena of intimate relationships household provides the perfect setting to study women empowerment.

For women to become empowered in their intimate relationships, they
must develop ability to negotiate and influence the nature of the relationship and the decisions made within it.

Further, there are some unique features of women empowerment and household plays important role therein. As discussed above, empowerment refers to expansion of freedom of choice and action. Although this is true for women as well as other disadvantaged or socially excluded groups. The household and interfamilial relations are central locus of women disempowerment in a way that is not true for other disadvantaged groups. Negotiating new roles in the household is important because around the world, women spend more time on household work and child rearing than their male counterparts do (UNDP, 2007-08). While women's public role has changed significantly in recent decades, evidence suggests that there has not been corresponding change in gender relation within the private sphere (Hochschild, 1996; Sullivan 2004). Indian subcontinent, which includes India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, has seen strong female leaders who have led these nations, but the position of womenfolk within the household has remained dismal.

1.3 UNDERSTANDING HOUSEHOLD DECISION MAKING IS ESSENTIAL FOR FRAMING EFFECTIVE STATE POLICIES

The Indian Constitution envisages a welfare state wherein, the disadvantaged groups are afforded state help in terms of state largesse such as subsidies and pensions etc. most of these state largesse are aimed at upliftment of disadvantaged individuals, but the household is often the channelizing institution which allows the state to reach out to these targeted individuals. Most of the subsidies, like food subsidies etc. are distributed on household basis. Thus, it can be said that households are intermediated institutions which act as a interface between the policies, programs and the individual targeted for empowerment. Therefore understanding of household decision making is essential for tracing the effects of such programs and
policies. Studies which evaluate the impact of policies on household and ignore intra-household decision making in their analysis may lead to misleading conclusions.

For example, adopting aggregate measures such as household income as a measure of welfare of all household members may not be the best way of evaluating the effects of a policy or a program. It would be more useful to look at the intra-household allocation of income and other resources while examining the impact of policies on individual welfare.

1.4 HOUSEHOLD DECISION MAKING AND DEVELOPMENTAL ECONOMICS

If half the population is left out of the formal economy, then the economic development of the nation is bound to get adversely impacted. Disempowered women are often left out of the household decision making process and loose out in allocation of household resources. In our patriarchal society the decision about women taking up job outside of the home is often made by the dominant male members of the household and it is often detrimental to the interests of the woman.

Over the past several decades, developmental policy makers have taken notice of these gender issues in context of economic development. One of the central messages they have absorbed from research on gender is that many key development outcomes aimed at economic development, seem to depend on women's ability to negotiate favourable intra-household allocation of resources. This ability in turn is directly impacted by the extent of their role in household decision making. Development literature suggests that women's power within the household is linked to matters such as health, education of children and general well being of women and girls.

The World Bank has identified enhanced role of women in household decision making as one of the key factors in poverty
reduction. Thus, promotion of women empowerment as a development goal is based on a dual argument. Firstly, social justice is an important aspect of human welfare and is intrinsically worth pursuing. Secondly, women empowerment is a means to other ends such as increased female work participation, increased women education better health of children and female.

Evidence from developing countries such as Brazil, China, India, South Africa shows that when women control household income either through their own earnings or through cash transfers, children benefit as a result of more spending on food and education (World Bank 2011).

Further, with women now representing substantial percentage of the global labour force and almost than half the world’s university students, overall productivity will increase if their skills and talent are used fully by involving them in decision making processes at various levels, including the household.

1.5 CONSUMER ECONOMICS AND WOMEN IN HOUSEHOLD DECISION MAKING

In the past household was both a unit of production and consumption in the economy. But with advent of industrialisation and consequential corporatisation of the economy, household has lost the production function to the corporations and is now just a consumer unit of the economy. Thus it has become important area of investigation for consumer researchers. Consumer researchers have been studying roles of partners in private households and their relative contribution to purchase decisions for decades. The old approach to household consumer behaviour envisages typical role specialisation within the household, with husband being responsible for the certain household purchase decisions like purchase of car etc. and the wife for purchase of kitchen items and utensils. There seems to be a clear sex role orientation at play here. But with increased democratisation of most of the institutions due to increased and easy
availability of information the old stereotypes are fading. This democratisation has not left the household untouched, and purchase decisions within the household are increasingly becoming less stereotypical. If the extent of 'say' that women have in household purchase decision can be gauged it would help the marketers to make a more effective sales pitch.

Further, one of the major contributions that we make to the economy is through buying things. Women's role as care givers has meant that women play an especially prominent role in buying things that provide sustenance for home and family. Studies show that women are responsible for buying majority of household goods. As a market, women represent an opportunity bigger than China and India combined (Silverstein and Sayre (2009)). By some estimates they control or influence dollar 20 trillion in consumer spending. Although it is often played down, it is clear that women have a great deal of influence in the economy as consumers. As consumers, women live under a good deal of pressure. Many women must find ways to feed their families on a limited budget. They search for a balance between affordability, nutrition and availability countered with the personal preferences of their family. Women who are working outside of the home face the added problem of time constraint.

1.6 HOUSEHOLD DECISION MAKING; PATRIARCHY AND CULTURE

According to Adrienne Rich patriarchy is not only tracing of descent through the father but any kind of group organization in which males hold dominant power and determine what part females shall and shall not play, and in which capabilities assigned to women are relegated generally to the mystical and aesthetic and excluded from the practical and political realms (1980). The connection between the predominance of patriarchy in a society and higher influence of men in decision making process is demonstrated by studies that compare the decision making influence of couples from different
cultures. Ford, La Tour and Henthorne (1995) reported that in the patriarchal Chinese society less joint decisions are made and that more male dominance prevails, then among Americans Webster (1994) showed in the studies that if Mexican families living in the U.S.A highly identified with the Hispanic culture, the husbands are usually dominant in household decision making, including purchase decisions.

In our Indian society as well, gender is a primary structural dimension around which behaviour and expectations are built. Male authority is prevalent and almost universally accepted in our society. The decision making power is culturally vested in males and women are relegated to a secondary role. This is particularly true about the societies of North India and particularly of Punjab.

When we study role of women in household decision making, what we essentially deal with is the nature of gender relations within the household. The nature of gender relations i.e. relationship of power between women and men is not easy to grasp in its full complexity. The complexity arises from the fact that gender relations, like all social relations, involve both material and ideological aspects. The gendered nature of intra-household relations is revealed not only in the division of labour and resources between men and women, but also ideological sphere; as is evident from ascribing of different abilities, attitudes, traits, desires, personality to men and women. Gender relations within the household are both constituted by and help constitute these practices and ideologies, in interaction with other societal structures such as class, caste, race and religion.

Being influenced by such social variables as culture, caste, religion etc., gender relations within the household are neither uniform across societies nor historically static. Thus, it is important to take the socio-cultural setting or back-drop into perspective while studying the role of women in household decision making. This is so because these socio-cultural settings are primary determinant of the nature of gender relations within the household and thereby of the
bargaining power of women within the household decision making process.

It is said that social norms could affect the role of women in household decision making in at least two ways. Firstly, they set limits on what can be bargained about and secondly, they affect how the process of household decision making is conducted. Formal household models assume that a fully aware and typically self interested woman participates in household decision making through the bargaining process. Now, validity of this assumption is always subject to prevailing social norms.

**Changing family structure**

While examining the role of women in household decision making through the bargaining process the rapidly changing family structure must be kept in mind. Today families are moving from joint to nuclear structure. The joint families of the yore were fertile breeding grounds for conservative patriarchal norms which stifled the bargaining ability of the women within the household; whereas the nuclear families tend to be more egalitarian in decision making process and women voice is more likely to be heard therein.

### 1.7 WOMEN AND WORK: THE DOUBLE SHIFT PROBLEM

Women’s influence within the household increases with the increase in their contribution towards the total household income (Euwals, Eymann and Borsch, 2004). Furthermore, the occupational status of the women affects their bargaining power. The women, who are gainfully employed, exercise greater authority in all spheres of household decision making compared to women engaged in domestic housework only.

Women play key role in the 'care economy', which not only provides care to the young, old and the sick, but also is vital for ensuring a productive work force. As this work is non-remunerative, it is undervalued and lies outside the general conceptualisation of
economy. Thus, prima facie conclusion would be that working women are relatively more empowered, both within and outside of the household. But, as always there are two faces to the coin.

In conservative societies such as ours, women engaged in paid work often face double work day. They may only be allowed to work as long as their domestic duties are still fulfilled. This means that women are time poor and the time burden may impact on their health and well being.

This conundrum of 'double shift' can be solved by equitable allocation of household chores, with males of the household extending a helping hand to the women and taking on some of the domestic burden. This will essentially involve breaking some cultural stereotypes.

1.8 WOMEN AND ALTRUISM

The bargaining model of household decision making is premised on one simple assumption that household members engaged in bargaining about the household decision look out for their best interests. But what if, some of the household members, for instance womenfolk, do not act in their own interest and therefore do not bargain to their best advantage. For instance, it can be argued that household decision will be less favourable to a person the less value she attaches to her own well being relative to the well being of others and that this tends to be especially true in traditional societies such as India. Here women may tend not to think in terms of self interest or of their individual well being. Women's socially constructed altruistic behaviour means that even those economic resources that enter the household via women are more likely to be spent on household and children's needs.

1.9 MEASURING CRITERIA

The above limitation of the bargaining model of the household decision making though relevant, but is not of such magnitude as to
reject the whole paradigm of bargaining within the household. It is still the best available conceptualisation to study women's socio-economic empowerment at household level by studying their role in household decision making. Household decision making role of women is used as proxy to study women empowerment, as women empowerment is not directly measurable. It may be valued differently depending on the subjective views of individuals. In this thesis women's perception of their own situation is used to gauge the extent of women's empowerment. For example, if they believe that they do not have any part in decision making in the household, they will most likely not participate in household decisions, even if other members of family believe that the woman has a part to play.

1.10 STUDY HAS TO BE REGION AND CULTURE SPECIFIC

Now, one of the primary goals of studying role of women in household decision making is to understand dynamics of intra-household decision making, so as to ascertain opportunities which can be exploited through targeted policy interventions to improve the lot of women folk. Household models and policies could go wrong if intra-household dynamics are assumed to exist in isolation. As discussed earlier, it is very important to conduct such study in context of peculiar socio-cultural and legal framework existent in particular region.

Thus, it is a logical corollary of above discussion that any such study, which seeks some answers pertinent for policy formulations aimed at women empowerment, must necessarily be conducted in regions which are socio-culturally homogenous, so that effective policies for women empowerment could be devised for that region.

For the aforesaid reasons we find that most of the household studies are state level studies and very few are national level studies.
1.11 GLOBAL SCENARIO

As discussed earlier women empowerment at the household level, i.e. their role within the household decision making is geographic, demographic as well as culture specific. It varies from nation to nation; it may even vary within different regions of the same nation, as is the case with large and culturally heterogeneous countries such as India and China.

This peculiar feature of women’s role in household decision making makes it imperative that any study concerning women’s role in household decision making must be region specific, and such region must be culturally homogeneous. Thus, it is difficult to construct an overall picture of women’s role in household decision making at international scale.

But, on global scale a comparative assessment of women’s role in household decision making can be made on the basis of developed nations and developing nations.

Women in Europe and America have made a considerable progress towards equality with men since the industrial revolution, but still not reached that level. In starting phase the revolution improved the status of women, but slowly they were exploited by the way of cheap labour. On the other hand, middle and upper class women were mostly confined to home. Both working and upper class women stressed on change and fought for equal rights. They have succeeded in several fields but are only in small minority. As Michael D. Yates notes that women are invariably segregated in certain types of occupations and these are typically the poorest paid and the least prestigious. It is even the case that women increase their employment in an occupation, the relative wage rate of that occupation usually falls (2003). On the other hand women from non-western counties or the Third World generally live in a state of misery and struggle.

Some developing nations, such as India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan have had women as head of government but still at ground level
women there face struggle for equal rights. Poor countries by no means have a monopoly on gender inequality both within and outside of the household. Men earn more and make more decisions in essentially all societies, whether developing or developed. However, disparities in such areas of household decisions like health, education and decisions about children; tend to be larger in countries with lower levels of development.

Developed countries of the West show far less disparity between men and women decision making role, though still skewed in favour of males, whereas in developing countries such as those of South Asia, Africa and Latin America the gender disparity between household decisions making role is very large.

Economic development is not the sole explanation for the existing differential in the role of women in household decision making when a comparison is made between different societies. Even when economic conditions change skewed gender norms, which allow lesser power to women, still persist. A very common example is that of ethnic or cultural minorities in developed countries of the west, like Indian or Chinese immigrants in U.S or Canada. These ethnic minorities still carry and stick to old norms of their native country and their women are relatively less empowered at the household level as compared to average women of the host country. Thus, inference that can be drawn is that the culture has greater effect on the household decision making process as compared to pure economic development.

Though advances in gender equality have occurred over the past 25 years, there remains a huge gap between the promises of equality and everyday reality for women in many parts of the world. According to the World Bank’s World Development Report on Gender Equality and Development (WDR 2012), in developing countries, girls now outnumber boys in secondary schools in 45 countries and women now represent 40 per cent of the global labor force. However, these gaps have not narrowed evenly for everyone, everywhere. For every
woman who dies in childbirth in Sweden, 1000 women die in Afghanistan, 815 in Somalia, 495 in Nigeria, and 122 in Pakistan. Globally, excess female mortality after birth and ‘missing’ girls at birth account for an estimated 3.9 million female lives lost each year in low- and middle-income countries. Drawing on quantitative and qualitative data, including new field research covering over 4,000 men and women in 19 developing countries, the report focuses on the economics of gender equality. It notes misallocation of women’s skills and labor due to market or social discrimination which result in large economic losses.

1.12 INDIAN SCENARIO

During the Vedic period women enjoyed place of pride in the Indian society. They were involved in the decision making concerning the important issues of the household as well as the society at large. No ceremony was considered to be complete or sacred unless women participated. They were encouraged to seek knowledge in varied disciplines. Gradually, these freedoms and rights got eroded and increased orthodoxy took hold of the Indian society: first under the influence of Manu et al and latter during the Muslim rule. The glorious status of women declined. They were pushed into the background and denied all privileges. The urge for equality on the part of Indian women started getting momentum during the colonial times, influenced by the exposure to western concept of equality. Noted social reformers and national leaders like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Annie Beasnt, Sorojini Naidu and Ishwar Chandra Vidaya Sagar made selfless efforts to create awareness among women about their status and were quite successful in removing various social evils such as sati pratha, child marriage and polygamy. They also encouraged women remarriage and women education. During the National struggle for freedom women participated in great numbers and entered the arena of public life. In post independence India, improvement in the status of women was a pledge made in the constitution. Constitution of India
prohibits discrimination on grounds of gender (Part-III, Article 15) and recognizing the weak position of women in our society, the constitution of India provides for positive discrimination or affirmative action aimed at women empowerment. The directive principles of state policy (part IV, constitution of India) also envisage upliftment of women. India has also ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which makes the country obligated to eliminate violence and discrimination against women.

These high minded legal provisions notwithstanding, informal institutions like customs and other social norms govern gender relations in the Indian society, especially within the household, and in many ways justify discrimination against women. India is a patriarchal, patrilocal, patrilineal society. Many cultural and social norms create a situation where women and girls are discriminated against. Women are usually restricted to household duties and are not the "providers" of the household. Inheritance usually passes from father to son in a patrilineal pattern. To give away a daughter in marriage can be costly, with the obligation to pay dowry and after marriage bride has to move to another village or district. Therefore, girls are not seen as a reliable care giver in the future and investments made in daughters will be for another family's benefit. This negative influence of these informal institutions has resulted in relatively dismal status of women in our society; which manifests itself in the household as well through skewed household decision making process, which is geared against increased women participation. The statistics tell the true story: India is ranked is 136th among 187 countries evaluated for Human Development Index (HDI) (UNDP, 2013).

The overall life expectancy has increased to 66.9 years and literacy has increased to 74 per cent (G.O.I, 2011). The female literacy rate is 71.2 per cent as compared to 82 percent for males. The overall
sex ratio is 940 female per 1000 males according to 2011 census. India ranks 126 for educational attainment while 114 for lower sex ratio at birth which makes it lowest ranked among BRICS nations (The Global Gender Gap Report, 2014).

1.13 PUNJAB SCENARIO

As the history of Punjab highlights, due to location of the state in North West India, it was attacked by many invaders and was like a gateway of India. The culture of the state is deeply influenced by wars and invasions. This resulted in degradation of females of the community. Social evils like female infanticide, dowry, and gender based violence all raised their heads. Punjabi society has been traditional and deeply conservative, with patriarchy having deep roots in all aspects of life. No wonder that women are given secondary status in all spheres of life including the household. The birth of female child is considered inauspicious, while that of son is an occasion for rejoicing. As a daughter, she lives under the strict supervision of her parents, after marriage under that of her husband and as widow under the care of eldest son. Punjab has been beset with social backwardness and drawbacks like lowest sex ratio in the country, since 1921. At present the sex ratio in Punjab is 893 females per 1000 male against the national average of 940, and child sex ratio is even less at 845 females per 1000 males against 914 for the national level, according to the 2011 census. The work force participation of women in Punjab is low in the country (NSS 68th Round 2011-12). The female literacy rate for Punjab is 71.1 per cent, much lower than the male literacy which is at 81.5 per cent (2011 Census).

1.14 NEED FOR THE STUDY

Household is one such social institution where women are almost equally represented as compared to their male counterparts. And household decision making affects many choices with important
consequences including the distribution of income, allocation of resources, the allocation of time, purchase of goods, and fertility decisions. If there is a gender inequality in household decision making then this affects the economic well being of women and children in the household. The empirical studies, as the present one, are needed on household decision making and there is need to build a dynamic theory of household decision making that explains the evolution of household behaviour with respect to gender inequality with changing social and economic environments. The implications of research, as this one, are important both to policy makers and researchers who are interested in raising the incomes and welfare of individual family members, particularly women and children, and to those who endeavour to understand and influence the processes through which households make decisions. As more and more institutions become democratic in nature allowing for greater participation of deprived sections of the society in the decision making process, it becomes imperative that the most deprived and largest sections of the society i.e. women are allowed greater participation in the decision making process especially in the household decision making and ensure that this most intimate of the societal institutions does not remain untouched from this wave of democratization. This is essential to ensure that household decision making becomes egalitarian and the patriarchal yoke is removed from over the household. The present study is an endeavour towards understanding the household decision making scenario in Punjab and the dynamics involved therein. And to further suggest measures to ensure greater participation of women in household decision making.

1.15 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study advances with the following objectives:

1. To study the socio-economic profile of the respondents;
2. To explore the relative decision making role of women belonging to urban and rural households.
3. To examine the relative decision making role of working and non-working women.
4. To analyse the impact of various socio-economic determinants on the role of women in different areas of household decision making.
5. To examine the extent of overall women empowerment at the household level.
6. To suggest measures for increasing the role of women in household decision making.

1.16 HYPOTHESES

The hypotheses formulated for the study are:
1. Urbanisation has positive impact on role of women in household decision making.
2. Working status of women has positive impact on their role in household decision making.
3. Education, income, age, caste, type of family - joint or nuclear, and position within household hierarchy each has positive impact on the extent of women's role in household decision making.

1.17 CHAPTER SCHEME

The study is organized into following seven chapters:
1. Introduction
2. Review of Literature
3. Data sources and Methodology
4. Socio-economic Profile of the Respondents
5. Role of Women in Household Decision Making
6. Socio-economic Determinants of Women's Role in Household Decision Making
7. Summary, Conclusions and Policy Recommendations