

## **Exploring Gendered Dynamics in Household Decision-making : A Case Study of the Tamang Community in Nepal**

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*This study presents a case study conducted within the Tamang community in Nepal, aiming to deepen our understanding of gender roles and relations in household decision-making. Drawing on feminist theories and gender analysis frameworks, the research explores decision-making processes, division of labour, and social and cultural conditions. Data was collected through observation, interviews, questionnaires, and focus group discussions from 32 Tamang households, employing a descriptive ethnographic research design. The findings reveal significant gender disparities in decision-making, with males holding the majority of power in family affairs such as seeking treatment and schooling, while females have limited involvement. Women's participation in decision-making related to family planning and childbearing is also constrained. The study*

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*highlights a gender-specific division of labour, where females bear the primary responsibility for household tasks. Male participation in these activities is minimal, reinforcing traditional gender norms and limiting women's engagement in public spheres. This research provides valuable insights into the gendered dynamics within the Tamang community, shedding light on the challenges faced by women in decision-making processes and household responsibilities.*

[**Keywords** : Gender, Gender roles, Household decision-making, Tamang]

## **1. Introduction**

The concept of gender encompasses the behaviors, roles, and relationships between men and women within societies. It is influenced by various factors such as social, cultural, economic, political, and ecological elements (Goverman & Gurung, 2001). Unlike biological sex, which refers to the inherent physical differences between males and females, gender roles are socially constructed and can vary significantly across different countries and even within different regions of a country. For instance, the types of activities deemed appropriate for men and women differ across societies, organizations, and cultures. These roles and attitudes are not fixed and can vary based on age, social class, caste, ethnicity, and other contextual factors. Gender roles shape the division of labour, with tasks and responsibilities assigned based on societal norms. This includes production-related activities, reproductive duties, and social/community management roles (Goverman & Gurung, 2001).

The valuation of these tasks differs for men and women, leading to differential access and control over resources, decision-making processes, and the benefits derived from them (Geetha, 2002). These gendered access dynamics are socially constructed and impact various aspects of life, including resource allocation, power dynamics, and overall well-being. Understanding the complexities of gendered decision-making and its implications is crucial for promoting equality and challenging traditional gender norms. Examining and questioning the existing gender arrangements can help identify alternative approaches that value and embrace diversity (Geetha, 2002).

Gender roles and relations are socially constructed and exhibit variations across cultures and social groups, influenced by factors such as class, ethnicity, education, technology, economy, and crises (Oakley, 1972; Murphy, 1962; Hartley, 1966; Murdock, 1937;

Malinowski, 1963; Chakravarti, 1993; Luitel & Joshi, 1988). Traditional gender roles undergo transformations in response to these factors, albeit with limitations imposed on both men and women. Research indicates that gender roles and relations often rely on stereotypes associated with female behavior, reinforcing gendered expectations (Oakley, 1972).

Socialization plays a crucial role in perpetuating gender constructions within different societies and cultures. During the process of socializing children, the social and cultural aspects of gender are reinforced through gestures, behaviors, and symbolic ideologies (Luitel, 2008). At birth, newborns are not only assigned a sex but are also assigned a gender, with cultural expressions of congratulations and comments like “smart boy” or “pretty baby girl” reflecting gender aspirations prevalent in many societies. Such attitudes indicate biases and preferences towards specific genders, influencing the opportunities and support that individuals receive for their future development (Luitel, 2008). Research suggests that differential treatment towards male and female children begins as early as infancy, with mothers spending more time with male infants compared to female infants (Oakley, 1972).

These observations indicate that gender roles and relations are not solely acquired mechanically from parents but are shaped through a variety of interactions. Gender roles are primarily learned through the socialization process and are influenced by the cultural context of a particular society. In Nepal, women face social, cultural, and political biases within the traditional male-dominated society. They experience limited access to education and employment opportunities, reduced power and agency, and minimal authority to initiate actions (Dangol, 2010). Economic dependence on men is prevalent, as men are traditionally regarded as assertive and bread-winners, with a focus on material success. Women are predominantly confined to household and domestic activities, while their roles as decision-makers are often undermined or discouraged within households and society (Dangol, 2010). Despite significant contributions as labour and mentors, women’s roles are frequently underestimated and not recognized as valuable economic activities (Dangol, 2010).

Numerous studies have attempted to explain gender roles and relations across various societies through books and newspaper

articles. However, these findings required further clarification through sociological analysis. The purpose of this study is to analyze the gender roles and decision-making processes within the Tamang community. The specific objectives of the study are to explore and identify the specific gender roles and decision-making processes that exist within the study area. Additionally, the study aims to analyze the social and cultural conditions that influence these gender roles and decision-making dynamics within the Tamang community. By achieving these objectives, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in gender relations and decision-making processes within a specific cultural context.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Feminist Theory**

Numerous feminist theories have emerged to explain gender roles and relations, each rooted in different ideologies. Liberal feminism advocates for gradual changes in the political, economic, and social status of women, emphasizing the need for equal opportunities and the elimination of gender-based discrimination (Ritzer, 1992). Marxist feminism combines Marxist class analysis with feminist social protest, highlighting the interplay of class and gender inequality (Barrett, 1989; Mitchell, 1975; Sargent, 1981). Radical feminism focuses on the sex/gender system as the fundamental cause of women's oppression, delving into the dynamics of gender relationships (Jaggar, 1983). Socialist feminism critiques the gender-blindness of Marxist feminism and argues for the simultaneous overthrow of capitalism and patriarchy (Ritzer, 1992).

Third-wave feminism emphasizes the experiences of marginalized groups within the feminist movement, such as women of color, and highlights diversity among women (Ritzer, 1992). Psychoanalytic feminism draws on Sigmund Freud's theories, emphasizing the role of subconscious and unconscious influences in shaping personality development and maintaining patriarchy (Ritzer, 1992). Postmodern feminism critiques patriarchal aspects of society and embraces diversity, rejecting essentialist conceptions of femininity (Olson, 1996). Third World minorities feminism focuses on the empowerment of minority women through modest political and economic concessions (Arquiza, 2012).

## **2.2 Gender Analysis Framework**

Gender analysis frameworks are essential tools for examining gender differences and inequalities in society and understanding their implications for development. These frameworks provide structured approaches to analyze various aspects of gender dynamics. Five commonly used frameworks have emerged:

The Harvard Analytical Framework, also known as the Gender Roles Framework, emphasizes the importance of allocating resources to both women and men in development efforts, highlighting the efficiency of such an approach (Overholt, 1985). The Moser Gender Planning Framework, developed by Caroline Moser, recognizes women's roles in production, reproduction, and community management. It assesses their specific needs and examines their access to resources (Moser, 1983).

The Gender Analysis Matrix is a community-based tool that encourages active participation and engagement from the community. It facilitates the identification of gender differences and challenges prevailing assumptions about gender roles and responsibilities (Parker, 1993). The Women's Empowerment Framework, formulated by Sara Hlupekile Longwe, takes a political perspective, emphasizing that women's poverty is a result of oppression and exploitation. It proposes five levels of equality – control, participation, conscientisation, access, and welfare – to guide the assessment of development interventions (Longwe, 1995).

The Social Relations Approach, developed by Naila Kabeer, adopts a structural feminist perspective. It goes beyond individual roles and analyzes gender inequalities within broader social and institutional contexts, aiming to identify and address factors that constrain women (Kabeer, 1994). These frameworks offer valuable analytical tools for understanding the complexities of gender dynamics and informing the design of inclusive and gender-responsive development policies and interventions.

## **3. Study Area and Methodology**

The study area for this research is Pauwa, located in Bhumlutar Village of Kavrepalanchok district. Pauwa, specifically, is chosen as the study area due to its significance as a primary residential area of the Tamang community in Kavrepalanchok district and to address the research gap and gain insights into the gender roles and relations within the Tamang community, specifically in Pauwa village.

The research design used in this study is primarily descriptive ethnographic research. It involves recording observed events and providing a thick description of the culture and ways of life, with a special focus on analyzing gender roles and relations. The study area consists of 32 Tamang households, and non-probability sampling was employed as the population is relatively homogenous. Both primary and secondary sources of data were used, including observation, interviews, questionnaires, and focus group discussions. Observation was conducted to understand the lifestyle and situation of the study area, while interviews gathered qualitative data on the roles of Tamang men and women in various domains.

Questionnaires were used to collect information on social, cultural, and economic conditions, family size, marital status, occupation, education, and gender roles and relations. Key informant interviews were conducted with six individuals to generate key data on gender roles and relations. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and simple statistical methods, involving the identification of relevant themes and concepts, organizing materials accordingly, and developing generalizations. Descriptive analysis was applied to various aspects such as the physical setting of the village, climate, economic aspects, agriculture system, and women's roles and relations. Demographic features were analyzed descriptively and statistically. Quantitative data were analyzed using computer software packages.

## **4. Data Presentation and Analysis**

### **4.1 Decision-making Role in Family Affairs Activities**

Table-1 depicts decision-making role in family affairs activities on next page. It is evident that the decision-making roles in family affairs activities between male and female seems different. The research conducted in 2023 showed that in Tamang community out of the 32 informants there was a gender variation in decision-making processes within the family.

The case of decision taking for seeking treatment of the family members 26 (81.25%) out of the 32 informants are male and only 02 (6.25%) decision takers are female. Only 02 (6.25%) informants say that the decision is taken on the basis of consensus of the male and female. Only 08 informants have knowledge about the family planning methods and among them the decision takers were 05 (15.62%) were male and 01 (3.12%) are female. The only 02 (6.25%)

informants have taken the decision on consensus of male and female. It shows the inferior position of women in decision-making process in family affair activities. Only 02 (6.25%) female decides to burn the child as their wish (Table-1).

**Table-1 : Decision-making Role in Family Affairs Activities**

Activities	Decision Maker						Total H.H
	Male	%age	Female	%age	Both	%age	
Seeking Treatment	26	81.25	02	6.25	02	6.25	30
Schooling of children	20	62.5	02	6.25	10	31.25	32
Use of family planning methods	05	15.62	01	3.12	02	6.25	08
Seeking Child	26	81.25	02	6.25	04	12.5	32

Source : Field Survey, 2023

#### 4.2 Gender Roles in Household Activities

Table-2 shows the gender division of labor within the household activities. Tamang society of the study area shows the gender specific roles and relation in off-farm activities. The involvement of female in household activities is significant as compare to that of male counterpart.

**Table-2 : Gender Roles in Household Activities**

Household Activities	Number of Respondents						Total
	Male	%age	Female	%age	Both	%age	
Cooking	01	3.12	31	96.88	00	00	32
Cleaning	01	3.12	31	96.88	00	00	32
Fetching	01	3.12	29	90.63	02	6.25	32
Washing	01	3.12	31	96.88	00	00	32
Collecting Fodder	01	3.12	24	75	07	21.88	32
Caring Livestock	01	3.12	16	50	15	46.88	32

Source : Field Survey, 2023.

Almost all the activities in domestic affairs fall as responsibility of the women. The participation of female was higher than male in all

aspects of household affairs in the above table. In my study area, the respondents replied that in collecting fodders and care taking of livestock both male and female participation is also significant. The males participation in cooking, cleaning, fetching water, washing dishes and clothes is very low (3.12%, 3.12%, 3.12%, and 3.12% respectively) due to which women's should be engaged into this kind of work and loses the chance of exposure in public sphere. Respondents believe that all of the above works are for female and male do that work when the female members of the family are absent (FGD, 2023). There is a belief among the respondents that to conduct such types of household activities are female duties.

### 4.3 Gender Roles in Household Decision-making Process

By and large involvement of women in decision-making at households activities has remained low as compared to that of men. However, women's involvement in decision-making is not the same for all cultural groups.

**Table-3 : Gender Roles in Decision-making Activities in Tamang Community**

Activities	Number of Respondents						Total
	Male	%age	Female	%age	Both	%age	
Buying and selling grains	17	53.12	15	46.88	00	00	32
Control of the households wealth	16	50	15	46.88	01	3.12	32
Purchase goods/commodities from the market	17	53.12	15	46.88	00	00	32
Decision in household matter	20	62.5	10	31.25	02	6.25	32
Final decision for spending money in social, cultural and religious ceremonies	21	65.62	11	34.37	00	00	32

**Source :** Field Survey, 2023

The above table indicates the gender roles variation in decision-making activities in Tamang community. My study found that out of the 32 informants 17 (53.13%) male and 15 (46.88%) female

were involved in decision-making activities of buying and selling grains. The involvement of male and female in control of the household's wealth, purchase goods/commodities from the market, decision in household matter, and final decision for spending money in social, cultural and religious ceremonies is 16 (15%) and 15 (46.88%), 17 (53.12%) and 15 (46.88%), 20 (62.5%) and 10 (31.25%), and 21 (65.62%) and 11 (34.37%) respectively.

#### 4.4 Gender Roles and Relations in Community Level Activities

Community level activities are generally perceived as falling into the 'men's sphere'. This perception arises because women are 'invisible' when activities outside the household are considered. In Pauwa, there are few community activities. The people explained that (FGD, 2023) religious ceremonies are generally celebrated together by the Tamang. When such ceremonies are performed, the organization is equally shared by men and women, but the purchase of items for the ceremony is mainly undertaken by men only. Arrangements are undertaken by women and the girls assist as well. The ceremonies are attended by men, women, and children (See table-4). Community meetings are generally attended by men because it involves leaving the homestead.

**Table-4 : Gender Roles and Relations in Community Level Activities**

Community Activities	M/W/G/B	Comments
Ceremonies and celebrations	M/W/G/B	
Organizing	M/W	Predominantly
Arranging	W/G	Predominantly
Purchase of items for ceremonies	M	Predominantly
Attendance	M/W/G/B	
Community meetings	M/W/G/B	
Clubs	M/B	Predominantly
Mothers' group	W	Predominantly
Political meetings	M/B	Predominantly

**Note :** M = Man; W = Woman; G = Girl; B = Boy

Usually, all people participate in ceremonies and celebrations but women play the most important role and undertake organization, arrangement, and attendance at ceremonies, especially religious ones because these are believed to be the responsibility of

women. The men perform market activities, and they also attend the ceremonies. The women attend meetings concerning Mothers' group activities.

#### 4.5 Decision-making Roles in Cultural Practices

In the case of Nepal women possess different power and prestige in different communities. The high caste women in the hills and Tarai have low decision-making power owing to a subordinate position to men while the ethnic women of mountain and hill have high decision-making power (CEDA, 1982). Opposite is the case of Rana Tharus of Kailali where wife holds a prime position inside household. It is a practice that the wife pushes the plate with her foot while serving main food to her husband to show her superior status. However in the total cultural context men occupy high position due to patriarchal social system of the society (Luitel and Joshi, 1988). In this study, I have tried to highlight the fact that different socio-cultural and traditional norms and values have impact in decision-making roles.

**Table-5 : Decision-making Roles in Social Cultural Practices**

Activities	Decision Makers						Total H.H
	Male	%age	Female	%age	Both	%age	
Festival celebrating	20	62.5	10	31.25	02	6.25	32
Religious ceremonies	20	62.5	10	31.25	02	6.25	32
Life-cycle rituals	20	62.5	10	31.25	02	6.25	32
Final Decision	21	65.62	11	31.25	00	00	32

**Source :** Field Survey, 2023.

The research conducted in Pauwa village revealed the fact that women also involved in decision-making process in social cultural practices. Out of the 32 household for celebrating feast and festivals, religious ceremonies and life-cycle rituals, in 20 (62.5%) households the decision was done by male. In 10 (31.25%) households the decision was done by female. And remaining 02 (6.25%) households male and female jointly decided. Out of the 32 households, about 21 (65.62%) households the final decision is taken by male and 11 (31.25%) households by female. This table shows that the participation of female in decision-making process in celebrating social and cultural practices is lower than male counterpart.

#### 4.6 Gender Roles and Relations in Economic Activities

Agriculture is the backbone of the Nepalese economy. Women's role in agricultural production is main input. Women take substantial contribution to uphold domestic economy. Their share in the labour force continues to rise, they are becoming more involved in micro small and medium enterprises, and their income is becoming increasingly necessarily to all households. However, women are largely excluded from economic decision-making. They face low wages poor working conditions and limited employment and professional opportunity. Though women contribute to develop through paid as well as unpaid work such as domestic and community work is not measured in quantitative terms and not valued in national accounts.

**Table-6 : Gender Roles in the Agricultural Activities**

Agricultural activities	Number of Respondents						Total
	Male	%age	Female	%age	Both	%age	
Seed selection	15	46.8	11	34.4	06	18.75	32
Planting	01	3.12	30	93.75	01	3.12	32
Weeding	00	--	27	84.37	05	15.62	32
Use of fertilizer	28	87.5	04	12.5	00	--	32
Harvesting	12	37.5	06	18.75	14	43.75	32
Land preparation	30	93.75	02	6.25	00	--	32

**Source :** Field Survey, 2023

The above table shows the respondents' perception about the women's personal condition. Out of the 32 respondents only 01 male informant feels that the status of women in Tamang society is excellent. Out of the 32 male and female informants 08 (25%) male and 16 (50%) female informants feel that the condition of women in Tamang society is satisfactory. Only 02 (6.25%) male and 05 (15.62%) female informants feel that the women condition is worse.

In the household even though women's work is vital, it is invisible, undervalued, unrecognized, and unpaid. Women around the world work twice as many hours as men and in most parts of the world their labour is vital to the family's survival. The assumption that household work is only women's work has limited women

inside household. Her work inside the household is also looked down upon as not being 'real' work just because it does not bring cash in hand. The universal belief that women work within the household and have little access to outside work is not true for all the societies. In most of the modern industrialized and developed/developing societies women have started to join the job market equally as men to meet the family needs. But there is little sharing by men in the household chores, baby care and other reproductive works conventionally done by women which has reinforced women to bear the triple burden (Moser, 1983).

## **5. Major Findings**

Major findings that emerge in this study may be summarized as under :

- ▶▶ Out of the 32 informants there was a gender variation in decision-making processes within the family. The case of decision taking for seeking treatment of the family members 26 (81.25%) out of the 32 informants are male and only 02 (6.25%) decision takers are female. Only 02 (6.25%) informants say that the decision is taken on the basis of consensus of the male and female.
- ▶▶ Only 08 informants have knowledge about the family planning methods and among them the decision takers were 05 (15.62%) were male and 01 (3.12%) are female.
- ▶▶ Although the household heads are female, they don't have equal decision-making rights as compare to that of male household heads.
- ▶▶ The involvement of female in household activities is significant as compare to that of male counterpart. In collecting fodders and care taking of livestock both male and female participation is also significant. The male's participation in cooking, cleaning, fetching water, washing dishes and clothes is very low. There is a belief among the respondents that to conduct such types of household activities are female duties.
- ▶▶ Both male and female are involving in decision-making activities in households affairs but the final decision is influence by the male side. There is a dominant role to take final decision in spending money in social, cultural, and religious ceremonies among the Tamang households.

- ▶▶ Religious ceremonies are generally celebrated together by the Tamang. When such ceremonies are performed, the organization is equally shared by men and women, but the purchase of items for the ceremony is mainly undertaken by men only. Arrangements are undertaken by women and the girls assist as well. The ceremonies are attended by men, women, and children.
- ▶▶ Usually, all people participate in ceremonies and celebrations but women play the most important role and undertake organization, arrangement, and attendance at ceremonies, especially religious ones because these are believed to be the responsibility of women. The men perform market activities, and they also attend the ceremonies. The women attend meetings concerning Mothers' group activities.
- ▶▶ In Pauwa village out of the participated respondents 06 (25%) female informants are involved in Mothers' Group and 02 (75%) informants are involved in Clubs.
- ▶▶ The participation of female in decision-making process in celebrating social and cultural practices is lower than male counterpart.
- ▶▶ Out of the 32 respondents only 01 male informant feels that the status of women in Tamang society is excellent. Out of the 32 male and female informants 08 (25%) male and 16 (50%) female informants feel that the condition of women in Tamang society is satisfactory. Only 02 (6.25%) male and 05 (15.62%) female informants feel that the women condition is worse.
- ▶▶ There is a variation of gender roles and relations in agricultural activities. Data shows that in planting process the involvement of women is high. Weeding is seems exclusively of female job and use of fertilizer and land preparation goes to on male side. In the case of harvesting the involvement of male and female is almost equal.
- ▶▶ The research conducted in the Pauwa village found that there is equal wage rate between male and female for the similar works. Out of the 32 respondents total 11 male and 21 female respondents told that there is no gender based discrimination for the wage of similar works.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study tried to explore the gender roles and relations in Tamang community in Pauwa village, Kavre, Nepal. There is a gender variation in decision-making processes within the family. The decision takers for using family planning are male. Very few female decides to burn the child as their wish. Although the household heads are female, they don't have equal decision-making rights as compare to that of male household heads. The involvement of female in household activities is significant as compare to that of male counterpart. Almost all the activities in domestic affairs fall as responsibility of the women. The participation of female was higher than male in all aspects of household affairs. In collecting fodders and care taking of livestock both male and female participation is also significant. The male participation in cooking, cleaning, fetching water, washing dishes and clothes is very low and male do those work when the female members of the family are absent. There is a belief among the respondents that to conduct such types of household activities are female duties.

The gender roles are based and guided by the traditional values. Both male and female are involving in decision-making activities in households affairs but the final decision is influence by the male side. There is a dominant role to take final decision in spending money in social, cultural, and religious ceremonies among the Tamang households. Usually, all people participate in ceremonies and celebrations but women play the most important role and undertake organization, arrangement, and attendance at ceremonies, especially religious ones because these are believed to be the responsibility of women. The men perform market activities, and they also attend the ceremonies.

The participation of female in decision-making process in celebrating social and cultural practices is lower than male counterpart. There is a variation of gender roles and relations in agricultural activities. In planting process the involvement of women is high. Weeding is seems exclusively of female job and use of fertilizer and land preparation goes to on male side. In the case of harvesting the involvement of male and female is almost equal. In Tamang of Pauwa village do not perceive women as superior to men in any of the indicators recorded.

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