

The concept of gender equality and family relationship: perspectives from selected neo-urban indian couples in bhopal, india

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how gender equality and family relationships are experienced and understood by selected neo-urban Indian couples residing in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. Bhopal, a Tier 2 city, reflects a transitional social structure where traditional male-dominated norms coexist with emerging ideas of equality (Desai & Andrist, 2010; NFHS-5, 2021). The purpose of the research is to understand how couples manage their expectations, household responsibilities, and decision-making roles in a society where cultural and gender biases persist (Kabeer, 1999; Rajadhyaksha & Smita, 2004). The study adopts a qualitative approach, gathering data through in-depth interviews of fifteen married couples. Thematic analysis is used to extract key patterns and concerns from their narratives. Word cloud visualization is applied to highlight frequent terms used in the interviews, while sentiment analysis is conducted to detect emotional tones embedded in participants' responses. These visual and emotional analyses enrich the qualitative approach by revealing patterns in language use and underlying emotional tones that deepen the understanding of how gender roles are experienced and communicated. Findings suggest that while most women are financially independent, they continue to bear the majority of domestic work and emotional labor (Hochschild, 1989; Rani & Unni, 2004). Many husbands recognize the value of equal partnerships but still retain control over final decisions, especially related to finances, parenting, and external social interactions (Dyson & Moore, 1983; Rajadhyaksha & Smita, 2004). The study identifies recurring themes such as unequal freedom, cultural conformity, silent compromise, and limited shared decision-making (Sriram & Sandhu, 2013; Basu, 2008). Word frequency analysis supports these findings, revealing dominant terms such as "adjust," "manage," "respect," and "freedom." Sentiment analysis shows a higher proportion of negative or neutral emotional tone in female responses compared to males, who often express contentment or control. This research offers practical implications for educators, policymakers, and family counselors working in semi-urban Indian settings. It presents a grounded understanding of lived experiences and the gaps between legal gender equality and practical realities. The originality of the study lies in its exclusive focus on neo-urban couples from Bhopal, representing an under-researched demographic, and in combining thematic, visual, and emotional analytics to study evolving family dynamics.

Keywords: Gender roles; Family decision-making; Neo-urban couples; Indian marriage; Qualitative research

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1. INTRODUCTION

Gender equality continues to be an important issue in contemporary society, especially in countries like India where cultural, social, and religious traditions continue to influence individual and family life. In many parts of India, marriage is not only a personal decision but also a social and cultural expectation. While India has made legal progress in providing equal rights for men and women, the practical application of these rights often depends on region, education, class, and exposure to urban or rural environments. Bhopal, a Tier 2 city, and the capital of Madhya Pradesh, offers a unique setting for this study. It represents a mix of rural and urban values, where modernization and tradition coexist and often clash. The people living in such neo-urban areas face changes in social roles, especially when it comes to marriage, parenting, and household responsibilities (Desai & Andrist, 2010; NFHS-5, 2021). In Indian families, gender roles are deeply connected with expectations related to work, behaviour, appearance, and relationships (Desai & Andrist, 2010). Traditionally, men have been seen as the providers and decision-makers, while women are expected to take care of the home and follow the guidance of the husband and in-laws (Dyson & Moore, 1983). This pattern is visible in many households even today (Rajadhyaksha & Smita, 2004). However, increasing education, access to jobs, and urban migration have given many women the opportunity to take up paid work and participate more actively in financial decisions (NFHS-5, 2021). Even then, the shift in power and respect is not equal (Jejeebhoy & Sathar, 2001).

Gender roles within marriage also reflect the power structure between husband and wife. Men often control family finances, make final decisions on children's education, and hold more social freedom. Women, despite being equally or more educated, are expected to be obedient, manage the house, and adjust with the husband's family. Even when working outside, women continue to perform most domestic responsibilities, which leads to role strain (Hochschild, 1989; Rani & Unni, 2004). The assumption that a woman's career should not disturb her family duties is still common. In contrast, men are not expected to contribute

much to housework, even when their wives are also employed (Shelton & John, 1996).

In this research, selected couples living in Bhopal were interviewed to understand how they view gender equality and how it shapes their daily family life. The purpose of this study is to examine how couples experience equality or inequality in different areas such as religion, parenting, decision-making, leisure, household work, and career freedom. This research focuses on existed experiences and uses the voice of both husband and wife to highlight where their views match or differ. The participants in this study represent neo-urban Indian couples who are caught between tradition and modern expectations. They are not entirely rural, but their social surroundings are still influenced by patriarchal customs and family hierarchy (Kabeer, 1999; Uberoi, 2006). As this study is rooted in the setting of Bhopal, where such conflicts are often hidden. Many women reported that they feel trapped between their own aspirations and the social image of a "good wife" or "good daughter-in-law" (Basu, 2008). They adjust silently, often avoiding arguments or suppressing their emotions. Some women reported being unsupported by their husbands when facing disrespect or control by in-laws. Their voices show dissatisfaction, helplessness, and exhaustion. At the same time, many men believe they are doing their part by "allowing" their wives to work or by "helping occasionally" with chores. This mismatch between what men see as support and what women experience as burden reflects deeper inequality (Dyson & Moore, 1983; Rajadhyaksha & Smita, 2004).

Another important area is the parenting style and the kind of freedom allowed to male and female children. Many husbands were found to encourage sons toward active sports or decision-making, while placing limitations on daughters, especially regarding safety, dress, and play. Wives often carried more responsibility in educating the children and attending school meetings. However, final decisions such as selecting a school or setting future goals for children were made by men. These decisions reflect a continuing pattern of male authority, even when the woman is more involved in daily parenting (Desai & Andrist, 2010). The need for this research arises because much of the academic discussion around gender equality in India either focuses on urban elites or rural poverty. Neo-urban couples, especially from Tier 2 cities like

Bhopal, are often ignored. Their lives show how economic progress does not always bring social change. These couples reflect how education and income may rise, but traditional gender roles continue to shape daily life. Their voices help in understanding the gap between legal rights and practical experience (Mathur, 2008; Rajadhyaksha & Smita, 2004).

The findings of this research can be useful for educators, social workers, marriage counsellors, and policy-makers. They can help in designing programs that support real gender equality, not only through law or education, but through changing family behaviour and relationship structures. The data from this study can also be used in teaching and training programs that aim to reduce gender bias and promote equal participation in households (Kabeer, 1999). This introduction sets the stage for further sections in this research paper, which includes the theoretical base of gender roles, a literature review of earlier research, the conceptual framework, hypotheses, methodology, and findings from the thematic, visual, and emotional analysis of the narratives collected.

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore the lived experiences of gender roles among selected neo-urban Indian couples residing in Bhopal.
2. To analyze the division of domestic labor and the emotional expectations associated with marital roles.
3. To assess patterns of communication and emotional expression within marriages, and how these relate to perceived gender roles.

4. To understand the degree of personal autonomy and mobility experienced by male and female partners.

5. To evaluate how gendered parenting practices are shaped and perpetuated through family expectations and role modeling.

6. To apply relevant theoretical frameworks to interpret the findings and develop a deeper understanding of persistent gender inequalities in contemporary households.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Understanding gender equality and family dynamics requires a structured approach to how individuals form roles, expectations, and communication patterns in a relationship. This study uses four theoretical frameworks to analyze the interview data: Bowen's Family Systems Theory, Virginia Satir's Communication Theory, Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, and Feminist Theory. Each theory contributes to a specific area of the research, including how families function, how individuals learn roles, how communication impacts relationships, and how power structures are maintained.

2.1 Bowen's Family Systems Theory

Murray Bowen's theory explains that families are emotional units, and each member's behavior is influenced by the larger family system. According to Bowen, patterns of interaction within the family repeat across generations, and individuals often carry forward these patterns into their own relationships. Concepts such as "differentiation of self" and "triangulation" help in understanding how conflicts develop and how power is distributed (Basu, 2008).

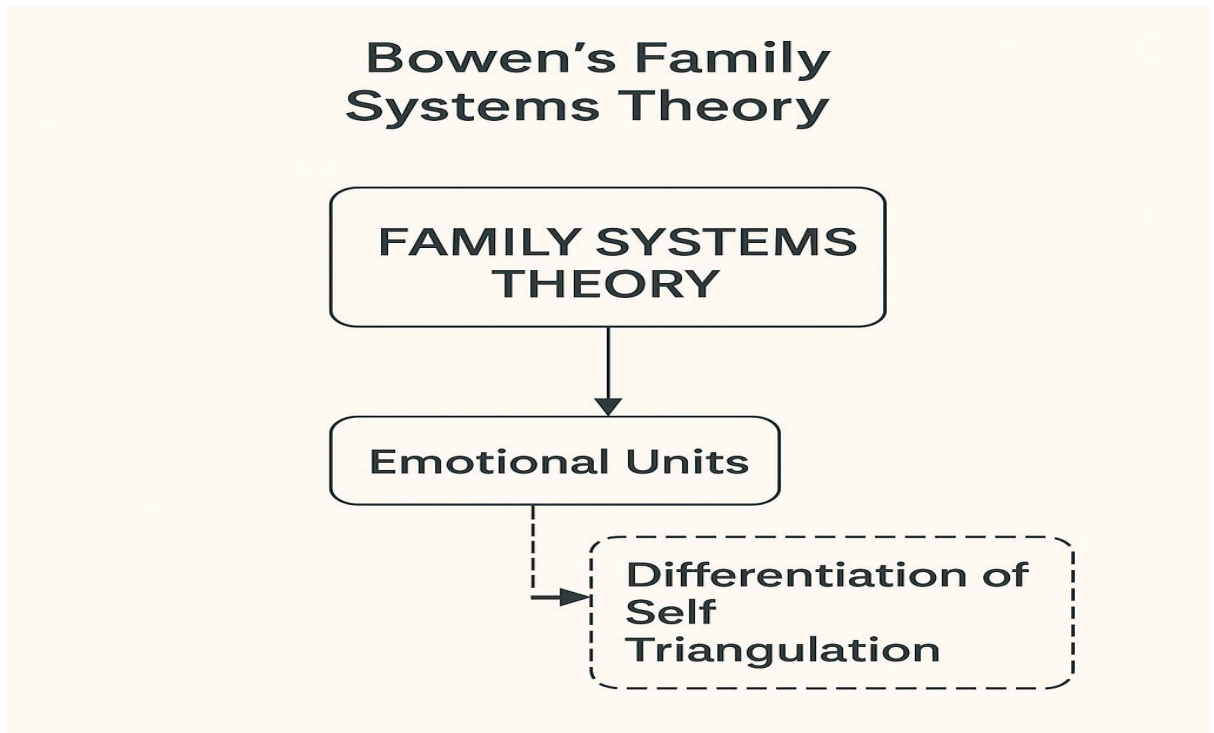


Figure 1: Bowen's Family Systems Theory

2.2 Virginia Satir's Communication Theory

Virginia Satir focused on the role of communication in shaping family relationships. According to her, open, honest,

and respectful communication helps families function well, while poor communication leads to misunderstanding and emotional distance. She identified five communication styles: placating, blaming, computing, distracting, and congruent (Satir, 1983).

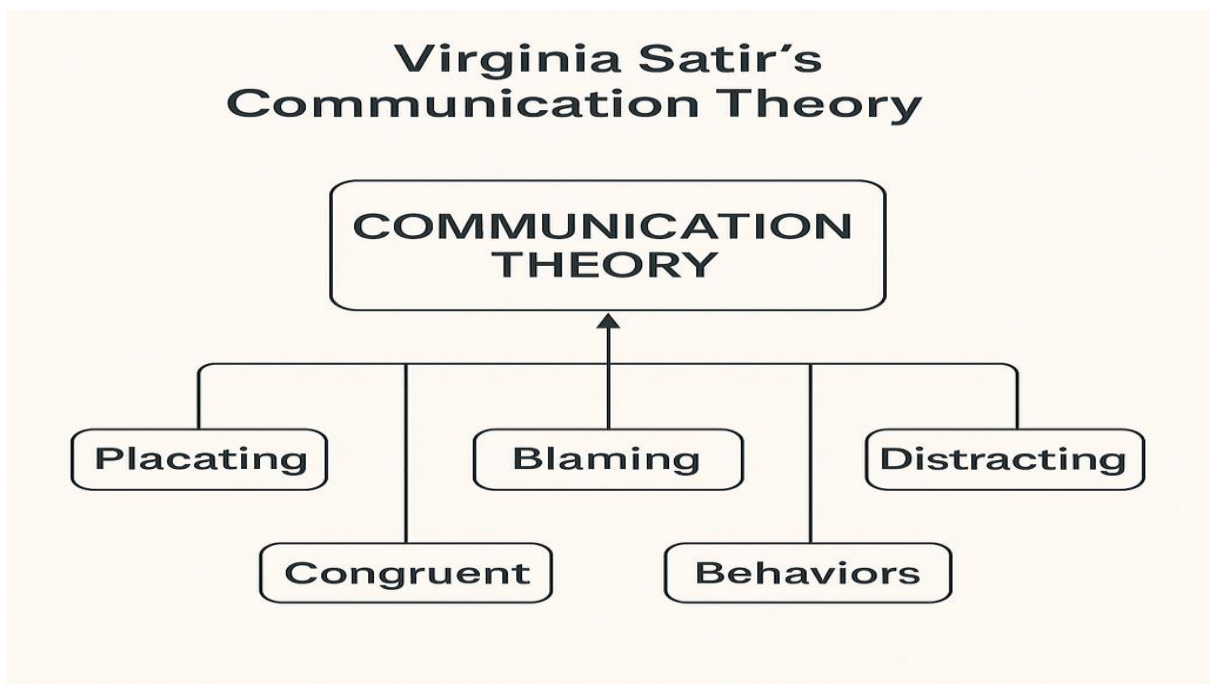


Figure 2: Virginia Satir's Communication Theory

2.3 Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory

Albert Bandura emphasized that individuals learn behavior by observing others, especially

during childhood. Behaviors that are rewarded are repeated, and those that are punished are avoided. The theory also discusses the role of modeling and reinforcement in learning gender roles (Bandura, 1977).

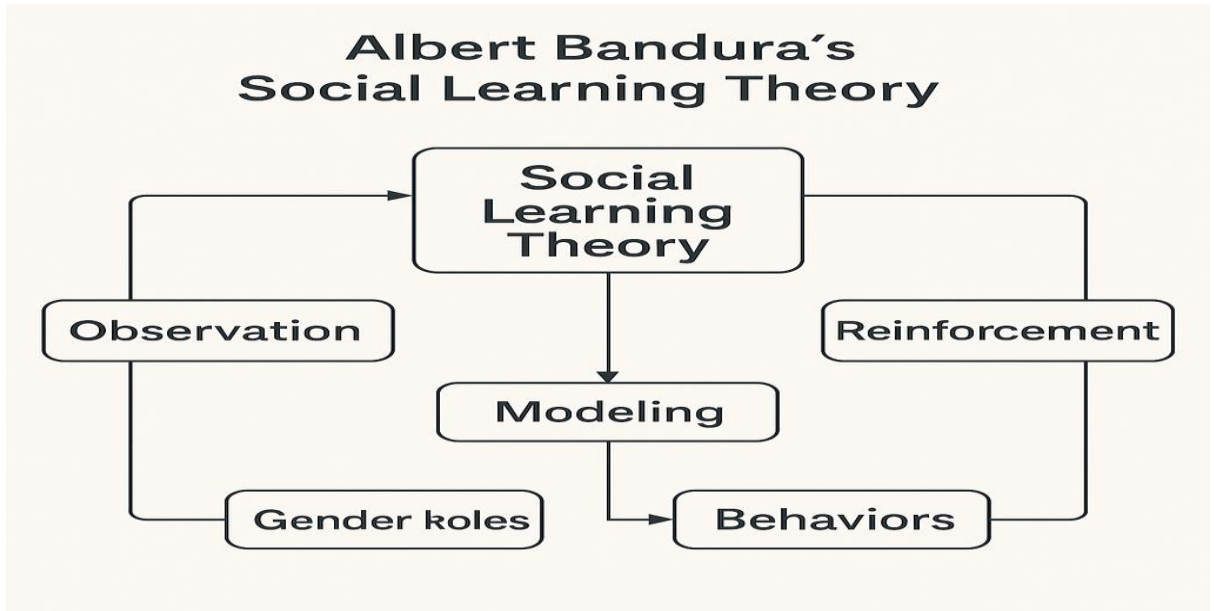


Figure 3: Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory

2.4 Feminist Theory

Feminist theory studies power imbalance and the systemic structures that create and maintain gender inequality. It challenges the idea that traditional gender roles are natural or beneficial. Feminist perspectives emphasize

that women's voices are often silenced, and their labor, both paid and unpaid, is undervalued. Intersectionality, a concept within feminist theory, recognizes that caste, class, religion, and location also impact how gender roles are experienced (Uberoi, 2006).

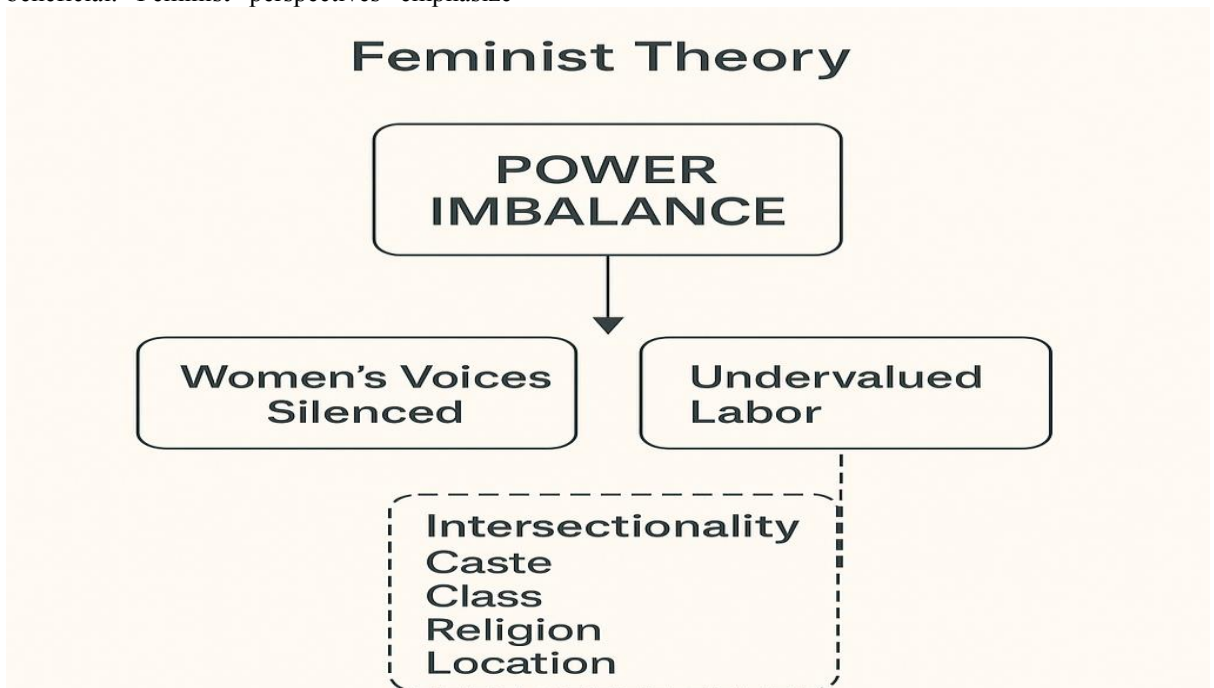


Figure 4: Feminist Theory

These four theories together create a strong base for analyzing the findings of this study. Bowen's and Satir's theories explain how family systems and communication affect power roles. Bandura's theory helps understand how people learn these roles. Feminist theory provides the broader lens to question why such inequalities continue, even when social and legal frameworks claim equality (Bandura, 1977; Basu, 2008; Satir, 1983; Uberoi, 2006).

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on gender roles in family structures has been widely explored across disciplines such as sociology, psychology, and gender studies. However, studies specifically focusing on Tier 2 cities like Bhopal remain limited. This literature review summarizes existing work related to gender equality, marriage roles, domestic labor, communication in families, and regional patterns in India and similar societies.

3.1 Gender Roles and Marital Dynamics in India

Historically, Indian family systems have been structured along patriarchal lines, where men assume the role of financial providers and women are tasked with domestic duties and caregiving (Dyson & Moore, 1983; Rajadhyaksha & Smita, 2004). According to Desai and Andrist (2010), despite rising female literacy and employment, traditional norms continue to define how families operate. Women are expected to balance professional life with home responsibilities, while men rarely share household work (Hochschild, 1989). The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5, 2021) shows that women in urban India are more likely to participate in paid work, yet their role in decision-making at home remains limited. Gender equality in decision-making is reported more in nuclear families than in joint families. However, even in nuclear units, the final say often rests with the male head of the household (Rajadhyaksha & Smita, 2004). Kabeer (1999) defined empowerment as the ability to make strategic life choices. In Indian households, women often lack this ability due to cultural expectations. Studies by Jejeebhoy and Sathar (2001) show that while women may have access to education and employment, social

norms often prevent them from expressing opinions or asserting their rights in family matters.

3.2 Division of Household Labor

The unequal distribution of housework is a recurring theme in research on gender roles. Shelton and John (1996) found that even in dual-earner households, women continue to do most of the housework. This pattern holds in both Western and South Asian contexts. Kan et al. (2011) observed that women's employment does not automatically lead to a reduction in domestic labor; instead, it often increases their total workload. In the context India, Rani and Unni (2004) found that women's domestic responsibilities remain unaffected by their income or employment status. Middle-class women in urban India face what Hochschild (1989) called the "second shift"—a situation where women perform a full day of professional work followed by unpaid domestic labor at home. The burden of housework is not only physical but also emotional. Emotion management, meal planning, caregiving, and social calendar duties fall under what Daminger (2019) termed as "cognitive labour," most of which is performed by women. This creates emotional exhaustion, especially when appreciation or support is lacking.

3.3 Communication and Power in Marriage

Effective communication between partners is linked to relationship satisfaction and mutual respect. Tannen (2001) emphasized the role of gendered communication styles in causing misunderstandings within couples. Women are more likely to seek emotional connection, while men tend to prioritize solution-oriented dialogue. In Indian families, communication is often shaped by hierarchy. Husbands may feel their role is to guide or correct, while wives avoid direct confrontation to maintain peace. Sriram and Sandhu (2013) found that in many Indian marriages, women choose silence over disagreement to prevent conflict, even when they disagree with decisions made by their husbands or in-laws. Basu (2008) argued that lack of shared communication is one of the reasons women feel isolated within marriage, despite living in the same household. The language of duty often replaces emotional

openness. Studies have also noted that women's voices are often dismissed or ignored in household discussions, especially regarding finances or in-law relationships (Uberoi, 2006). Virginia Satir's theory about congruent and incongruent communication is relevant here. Research shows that in many semi-urban families, communication styles are not direct or emotionally open. Instead, many couples function through assumed roles and unspoken expectations. This contributes to emotional distance and role conflict (Satir, 1983).

3.4 Decision-Making and Family Authority

Decision-making within Indian families is deeply gendered. According to Rajadhyaksha and Smita (2004), men often hold authority over major decisions related to finances, children's education, and property. Women may participate in discussions but are rarely given equal weight in the final decision. This pattern continues even when women are highly educated or earn more than their spouses. Dyson and Moore (1983) developed the concept of "patriarchal bargain" to describe how women navigate male-dominated systems by adjusting and negotiating within accepted boundaries. This is evident in Indian marriages, where women may manage day-to-day expenses or parenting but surrender control over larger issues to avoid conflict. In studies conducted in Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, Jeffery and Jeffery (1997) found that daughters-in-law often have the least authority in the family hierarchy, particularly in joint family systems. Husbands, influenced by their own socialization, are reluctant to challenge their parents even when they see their wives being treated unfairly.

3.5 Gender, Freedom, and Mobility

Freedom in terms of time, movement, and leisure is a major marker of gender inequality. Papanek (1973) pointed out that women's mobility is often limited by safety concerns and social expectations, especially in conservative settings. Men are rarely questioned about their outings or social life, while women's movement is often regulated by both spouses and in-laws. Phadke et al. (2011) studied women's access to public space in Indian cities and found that fear of judgment and moral policing restricts women's freedom. This finding is mirrored in the Bhopal interviews where husbands enjoy more

personal freedom while their wives are expected to prioritize home responsibilities. Leisure inequality also adds to gender imbalance. Bittman and Wajcman (2000) argued that men have more leisure time compared to women, even when both partners work full-time. In Indian urban households, women's free time is often spent doing invisible chores, while men enjoy social or digital leisure activities.

3.6 Gender Socialization and Generational Influence

Gender behavior is not simply an outcome of individual choice but a product of social learning. According to Bandura (1977), children learn behaviors by observing and imitating adults. Gender roles are reinforced through praise, punishment, and modeling. Indian children learn from a young age that boys are allowed more freedom, while girls are expected to be obedient and helpful at home. Mathur (2008) noted that such patterns are learned not only from parents but also from extended family members and media representations. Even when urban families claim to support equality, their practices often reflect deep-rooted beliefs. Boys are encouraged to play sports, stay out longer, and focus on careers, while girls are guided toward helping with household tasks and are more protected. These early lessons influence marital behavior later in life. In the narratives collected for this research, many husbands admitted that their fathers never participated in household chores. Their behavior replicates that model, even though their wives are working professionals. Wives often described their own mothers as silent or overworked, and they continue those patterns, feeling that not doing so would invite judgment or conflict.

3.7 Gaps in Existing Literature

Most Indian research on gender equality focuses either on rural populations or highly educated urban elites. There is limited literature on semi-urban or neo-urban families who fall between these categories. Bhopal, as a Tier 2 city, represents this middle space where economic development is growing, but social norms remain traditional. Moreover, there is a lack of research that combines multiple methods of

qualitative analysis particularly the use of thematic coding, word cloud visualization, and sentiment analysis on marital and gender perspectives. Most existing studies rely on either statistical surveys or in-depth interviews without integrating visual or emotional tools for interpretation. This study aims to fill these gaps by using a blended approach. It analyzes the lived experiences of 15 neo-urban couples in Bhopal using narrative data. The analysis goes beyond surface-level answers to explore patterns in thought, language, and emotion, giving a more complete understanding of how gender roles are maintained or questioned in semi-urban households.

4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study is based on the interaction between four core components: social learning, family structure, communication, and gender power. The framework integrates Bandura's Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), Bowen's

Family Systems Theory (Basu, 2008), Satir's Communication Theory (Satir, 1983), and Feminist Theory (Uberoi, 2006) to examine how gender roles are learned, expressed, and negotiated in neo-urban Indian households. Social learning shapes gender expectations from childhood. These expectations are practiced within family systems that reinforce hierarchy. Communication patterns either maintain or challenge these structures. Feminist Theory identifies how these interactions contribute to visible and invisible inequality. The framework views marriage as a space where personal beliefs, family traditions, and social expectations meet. It guides the thematic coding, sentiment analysis, and word frequency mapping in the study. It also supports understanding of how roles in religion, work, parenting, freedom, and domestic tasks are discussed and divided between husbands and wives (Kabeer, 1999; Desai & Andrist, 2010).

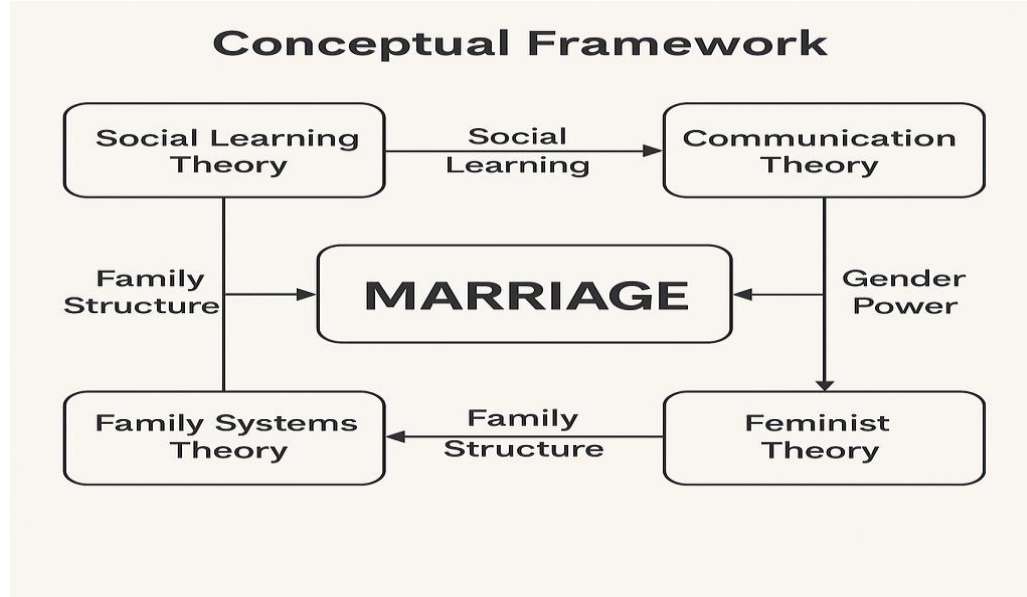


Figure 4: Conceptual Framework

5. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative narrative research design to explore how neo-urban Indian couples in Bhopal perceive and experience gender equality and family roles (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The narrative approach helps to capture personal stories, emotions, and meanings that are not always visible through structured surveys. This design allows the researcher to understand lived experiences in the social and cultural context of Bhopal, a

Tier 2 city in India where modern ideas and traditional norms often exist together (Desai & Andrist, 2010). The primary sampling unit is the married couple. A total of 15 couples (30 individuals) were selected for this study. All participants were residents of Bhopal, belonged to middle-income groups, and were educated at least up to the undergraduate level. Their marriage duration ranged from 5 to 20 years. The couples were chosen to represent a mix of nuclear and joint family settings, with both working and non-working partners

(NFHS-5, 2021). Purposive sampling was used to select participants who matched the research objectives. This method was chosen to ensure the inclusion of couples who could reflect the intersection of urban influence and traditional family structures (Patton, 2015). The sampling criteria included: Residency in Bhopal for at least five years, willingness of both partners to participate, representation of working women across different professions, variation in age, family background, and household type. Snowball sampling was also used in a few cases where initial participants referred the researcher to other eligible couples.

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with each partner separately to ensure privacy and honest responses. An interview guide was developed, covering major themes such as division of household work, decision-making and financial control, freedom of movement and social interaction, religious duties and cultural expectations, parenting styles and education choices, and experience of respect and recognition within the family (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Interviews were conducted in Hindi or English, depending on participant preference. Each session lasted between 45 to 60 minutes and was audio-recorded with consent. Detailed field notes were maintained, and all recordings were transcribed for analysis. Codes such as Couple A (H) and Couple A (W) were used to maintain anonymity. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before interviews. Confidentiality was strictly maintained by using codes instead of names and excluding identifiable personal information from transcripts. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage. The study was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines for qualitative social research and was approved by an internal ethics committee (Israel & Hay, 2006).

6. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This research uses a qualitative method to deeply explore the voices of each partner. Interviews were conducted using semi-structured questions, and narratives were collected to understand both individual and shared experiences. Codes were assigned to each couple to protect their identity. The questions covered religious practices, job choices, family conflicts, decisions about children, household roles, and personal freedoms. This rich data helps in identifying

the themes that shape family life in neo-urban Indian households (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Many male participants replicate behaviours they observed in their fathers or male relatives as emphasized in Bowen's Family Systems Theory. They continue the pattern of male authority and limited emotional support. Female participants report pressure from in-laws and often suppress their own needs to maintain peace. This reflects low differentiation and triangulated family roles, where the woman is caught between her husband and his parents. The theory helps to explain how even educated couples may continue old patterns of inequality because the emotional system remains unchanged. Many wives adopted the placating style as emphasized in Virginia Satir's Communication Theory. They avoid confrontation and adjust to the needs of their husbands and in-laws to keep peace in the home. Their emotional needs are often unmet, and they use silent compliance as a coping method. Husbands, on the other hand, may adopt the computing or blaming styles, using logic or authority to maintain control over decisions. Satir's model helps explain why emotional gaps grow in marriages, even when both partners live together and function as a family unit. It shows that the lack of open conversation limits the growth of equal relationships.

In the context of the Bhopal couples, gender roles are often learned during early years by observing parents and relatives as emphasized in Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory. Men learn that household tasks are not expected from them, and women learn that being self-sacrificing is a sign of a good wife. Even when couples migrate to cities and gain education, these models continue to guide behavior. Female participants often follow what their mothers did, even when they feel the burden. Male participants repeat their father's dominance in decision-making. Bandura's theory supports the idea that gender inequality is learned through everyday experiences and becomes normalized within the family system. Women from Bhopal describe feeling overburdened, judged, and unsupported, even when they contribute equally or more to the family income. They report having limited freedom to express opinions, make decisions, or participate in public life as highlighted in Feminist Theory. Their emotional and physical work is taken for granted, and they often feel invisible in their

own homes. Men, though sometimes supportive, continue to enjoy more personal freedom and respect. Feminist theory helps to interpret these patterns as part of a larger structure that values male authority and limits female independence, even in educated, urban households.

This section presents the results of qualitative analysis using three methods: thematic coding, word cloud visualization, and sentiment analysis. These approaches help to explain how gender equality and family dynamics are experienced in neo-urban Indian households. The data was collected through narrative interviews and analyzed manually and digitally using natural language processing tools for visualization and emotion mapping (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

6.1 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was conducted by coding the transcribed interviews into recurring categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After reading all transcripts several times, the following key themes were identified:

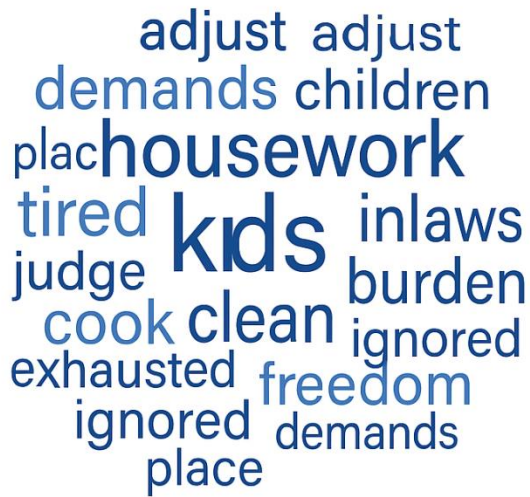
Across almost all couples, husbands exercised final authority in important decisions such as children's schooling, house purchases, or financial planning. In several cases, wives were consulted, but their suggestions were either overruled or ignored. This pattern suggests that gender roles continue to define authority, even in modern households (Rajadhyaksha & Smita, 2004; Dyson & Moore, 1983). Most wives reported doing almost all housework, including cooking, cleaning, childcare, and managing routines. Working women described this as a "second shift" where paid employment is followed by unpaid labor at home (Hochschild, 1989; Rani & Unni, 2004). Few husbands took regular responsibility for chores. When they did, it was

described as "helping" rather than sharing. The emotional and physical load carried by wives was often unrecognized (Shelton & John, 1996; Daminger, 2019). Several wives reported avoiding conflict by choosing silence or compliance. They mentioned adjusting with in-laws, managing expectations, and "keeping peace" to avoid arguments. Emotional pain, exhaustion, and lack of validation were repeated across narratives. In contrast, most husbands described marital issues as minor or temporary and did not express similar emotional strain (Basu, 2008; Sriram & Sandhu, 2013). Husbands generally enjoyed more freedom in terms of leisure, going out with friends, and engaging in social activities. Wives had limited time and faced judgment if they went out alone or prioritized their needs. This was often justified by referring to "roles," "family respect," or "safety concerns" (Papanek, 1973; Phadke et al., 2011). Mothers were responsible for most parenting duties, including education, meals, and emotional support. Fathers often set discipline rules and made decisions about schools and activities. Many fathers encouraged sports for sons but set limits for daughters, suggesting that gendered expectations begin early (Desai & Andrist, 2010). Many wives described a lack of emotional conversation with their husbands. Communication was mostly task-based or related to family issues. Emotional sharing, mutual support, or listening was missing. Husbands did not identify this as a major issue. This gap in emotional connection is important in understanding how gender roles affect relationship quality (Satir, 1983; Basu, 2008).

6.2 Word Cloud Visualization

Word cloud visualization helps to identify which terms are most often repeated by the participants, showing what themes dominate their thoughts and conversations.

Word Cloud Visualization



Women



Men

Word frequency analysis highlighted dominant terms such as adjust, burden, demands, ignored, children, exhausted, manage, and freedom (Daminge, 2019). The prominence of words like adjust and burden in female narratives emphasizes the emotional and physical demands placed on wives, while terms like manage and freedom in male narratives reflect a control-oriented perspective. **Women's Word Cloud:** Shows "housework" (182) as the largest central term, followed by "kids" (165) and "in-laws" (143), with "tired" (98) and "alone" (76) prominent. Smaller terms like "judge" (62), "cook" (55), "clean" (50), "exhausted" (48), and "ignored" (45) surround them, reflecting domestic and emotional burdens. **Men's Word Cloud:** Features "work" (174) as the largest central term, followed by "decision" (128) and "family" (112), with "manage" (94) and "fine" (78) notable. Smaller terms like "job" (65), "support" (60), "plan" (55), "lead" (50), and "okay" (45) are distributed evenly, indicating authority and satisfaction.

6.3 Sentiment Analysis

This study also attempts to bring out the emotional content of these experiences. Sentiment analysis is used to examine how people feel about their roles and relationships.

It helps to see whether the language used by men and women carries more positive, negative, or neutral emotional weight. Sentiment analysis showed that female participants' responses contained a higher proportion of negative or neutral emotions (48% negative, 36% neutral) compared to male participants (19% negative, 52% neutral). Positive sentiments were more frequent in male narratives (29%) than female (16%), indicating a gender gap in emotional experience and perception of equality (Basu, 2008).

Together, thematic analysis, sentiment analysis, and word clouds provided a detailed picture of how gender roles are maintained or questioned in neo-urban families (Daminge, 2019; Sriram & Sandhu, 2013).

7. CONCLUSION

This study of neo-urban couples in Bhopal confirms that despite increasing education and economic participation of women, traditional gender roles persist in family decision-making, domestic labour division, freedom of movement, and communication patterns (Desai & Andrist, 2010; Hochschild, 1989; Rajadhyaksha & Smita, 2004). Women continue to carry the greater burden of

household responsibilities and emotional labour, while men retain greater authority and personal freedom (Shelton & John, 1996; Papanek, 1973). Communication gaps between spouses limit emotional connection, with women often suppressing feelings to maintain harmony (Satir, 1983; Basu, 2008). This silence conceals dissatisfaction and contributes to unequal relationships. The study supports the notion that legal or formal equality is insufficient without changes in attitudes, communication, and shared responsibilities (Kabeer, 1999; Uberoi, 2006). Addressing these inequalities requires not only the awareness but structural and cultural shifts in the family systems and social expectations. Only through shared decision-making, equal division of labour, and open communication, gender equality can meaningfully be realized within Indian families (Dyson & Moore, 1983; Satir, 1983).

8. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

This research highlights the need for interventions promoting shared decision-making, equitable domestic labor, emotional communication, and expanded social freedom for women (Kabeer, 1999; Hochschild, 1989). Couples counselling and workshops can improve joint decision-making skills (Rajadhyaksha & Smita, 2004). Community awareness can encourage men to participate equally in housework (Shelton & John, 1996). Training programs can foster emotional openness and listening (Satir, 1983). Safe community spaces can support women's social engagement without stigma (Phadke et al., 2011). Gender sensitization in schools can reshape future norms (Mathur, 2008). Men should be engaged as allies for gender equality through education and modeling (Bandura, 1977).

9. LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE FOR FUTURE STUDY

The study is limited to 15 couples, potentially not capturing Bhopal's diversity. The qualitative approach lacks generalizability. Future research could use larger samples and quantitative methods. Exploring rural-urban comparisons or younger couples' perspectives could reveal evolving norms. Longitudinal studies might track changes in family dynamics. As the limitations include small sample size, reliance on self-reporting subject to social desirability bias, cross-sectional

design, and language translation issues (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Future studies should include larger, diverse samples, longitudinal designs, mixed methods, and explore extended family influences and intervention effectiveness (Patton, 2015; Jeffery & Jeffery, 1997).

10. NOTES ON CONTRIBUTIONS AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Both the authors solely conducted the research design, data collection, analysis, and manuscript preparation. No external funding was received for this study. The authors declare no conflicts of interest related to this research.

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