



WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND SOCIO-CULTURAL INCLUSION OF WOMEN IN TOTO COMMUNITY: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

Subrata Sarkar

RESEARCH ARTICLE



Author Details: Research Scholar,
West Bengal State University, Barasat,
West Bengal, India

Corresponding Author:
Subrata Sarkar

DOI:
<https://doi.org/10.70096/tssr.250303020>

Abstract

Women's empowerment is women's rights to live a holistic life, sense of self-worth, ability to make their own decisions and ability to influence social change. United Nation says 'Women's role is essential for the country's sustainable development.' So, all countries need to be more aware of women's education, women's consciousness and women's rights. Swami Vivekananda said "Just as a bird cannot fly on one wing, so our society or country cannot develop without women education or empowerment." So, Vivekananda said to give importance to women education. Similarly, Rabindranath Tagore protested the neglect of women in various ways in this patriarchal society. The introduction mentions the role of Toto women in empowerment and inclusion in society and culture. Above all we all need to be conscious about women empowerment and overall development. Although the women of the Toto community are lagging behind the rest of the nation, awareness is growing among them today. Toto women are getting their own power, own rights and education. As a result, women are also able to join various activities. The researcher mentioned the objectives of her research as empowerment of women in the community and inclusion of Toto women in society and culture. Present study will be adopted a descriptive and analytical study based on secondary data. Women in the Toto community were found to be empowered and inclusion in society and culture.

Keywords: *Women Empowerment, Toto Community, Sustainable Development, Women Rights, Socio-cultural inclusion*

1. Introduction

Toto Para, the smallest tribal community of West Bengal, lives in a village called Toto Para on the Indo-Bhutan border under Madarihat police station in Alipurduar district of West Bengal, India. In the tribal patriarchal social system men are the head of the family. Girls belong to husband's tribe after marriage. That is why sons enjoy certain religious and family rights which daughters do not get. Adivasi girls also cannot enjoy ownership of property. Because the rights of girls are regulated by social norms. However, these days many questions have arisen about the traditional customs in the tribal society (Nath, 2023). They want to reform many old customs. Many people have a new way of thinking about property rights of girls. It is definitely a result of modern education. Tribal women are mainly labourers. They are not averse to action. Women continue to work alongside men to provide for the family. In the workplace, however, tribal women and men have equal rights. In agrarian tribal society, women work equally with men in all tasks except ploughing the fields and spreading the seeds. They think land or soil is like women. Therefore, the work of spreading the seeds should not be done by women without men. All the other work i.e. forage, paddy harvesting, planting, cutting, threshing, bringing home loaded paddy, cleaning the farm, threshing are all done by girls equally with men. Apart from farming, they also do other work throughout the day. Especially their role in collecting forest resources cannot be accurately understood. Every twelve months they collect wood, leaves, fruits from the forest. Needless to say, they perform equal duties and responsibilities with men, but they do not get equal social status or equal opportunities in terms of inheritance of land. The women of the Toto community, a primitive indigenous people of the Bhutanese border, are quite different. Although their language, customs, rules etc. are different, the women of this society are basically working class. But the core of their lives and values remains largely unchanged. Although the women of these primitive tribal communities are far behind in terms of education and finances, the individualistic rather than collectivist approach prevails in their lives and social cooperative mentality still plays an active role in their way of life. Girls are not behind men in any respect. Men in this society give equal rights to women in all spheres and include them socially and culturally. Nowadays all are progressing in terms of education as well. A love for education is growing in them. As a result, the girls of Toto community are also getting educated in higher education and are establishing themselves by joining various government and private activities. Education is the backbone of society and one of the tools to remove the darkness of society. It is through this education

that girls can take away their rights. Once upon a time there was a tradition among the Toto community that anyone who moved out of the Toto Para village would be ostracized from the community. But today, forgetting the difference between men and women, everyone is moving forward equally.

1.1. Objectives of the Study

- i. To study the Women Empowerment of Toto Community.
- ii. To study the social inclusion of women in Toto Community.
- iii. To study the cultural inclusion of women in Toto Community.

2. Review of Literature

Ghosh (2020) discussed in her project to include women empowerment in MSW course. The title of the project paper is “A Study on the Empowerment of Women Enrolled in the MSW Course under Netaji Subhas Open University.” The researcher formulated the following objectives for the study to find out areas in which the women learners of MSW are engaged after obtaining their degree and to explore if there is an increase in the decision-making ability of the women learners. The researcher took 16 girls and 2 academic counsellors as her case studies and analysed them. The researcher found the following results through his research project- in the survey we will see that the students from the northern part of Bengal are having trouble establishing themselves because they have less NGOs and job opportunities are also limited and students are not only empowered to make decisions about their professional life, they are also empowered in their professional life.

Patnaik (2017) conducted the study on ‘Odisha Marching Ahead Towards Women Empowerment Through SHGs.’ The objectives formulated by the researcher for the study are- to inculcate a habit of thrift among the women community and to encourage small saving habit among them and to enhance the socio-economic condition of women through different income generating activities. The hypotheses mentioned by the researchers in her study are that lack of education is the main barrier to women’s empowerment and if the family size is small, then they are more active in decision making. She adopted self-help groups as methodology and for this she selected 16 self-help groups as random sampling to collect responses. She took questionnaires as tools and completed the research using survey method. Statistical methods (Mean, Standard Deviation, coefficient of variance) were used for data analysis to draw meaningful interpretation of the result obtained.

Jithu (2018) carried out a research analysis on ‘Empowerment through Employment: A Study among the Women Auto-Rickshaw Drivers.’ The objectives formulated by the researcher for the study are- to discuss various dimensions of women empowerment and how it appropriate to the women auto-rickshaw drivers in their day-to-day life. The researcher took 50 samples in Ernakulam district in Kerala and used descriptive research design through open-ended questions. The research has tried to solve the barriers of women empowerment in his research by different dimensions of empowerment in his interpretation.

Kaushiki and Garg (2023) conducted the study on ‘How Empowered are Women’: A Socio-Legal Study of the Position and Status of Women in the Indian Society.’ The researcher applied survey method in his study and took 100 samples. Used questions as tools. Collected information through question from different fields in survey method. The researcher discussed in his study how much women are empowered in terms of socio-culture and empowerment in terms of financial empowerment, political empowerment, education. The researcher found the Indian government and each state have taken different steps on how to empower these women. Government should give more priority to women to empower them. Our constitution also mentions the equal rights of women.

Dutt (2017) conducted a study on ‘The Role of Adult Literacy in Transforming the Lives of Women in Rural India: Overcoming Gender Inequalities.’ The objectives formulated by the researcher for the study are – To examine similarities and differences in the socio-economic context of rural women in Bhilwara district Rajasthan and Howrah district, West Bengal, India and to identify and analyse some of the key factors contributing to women’s access to and sustaining adult literacy in Bhilwara District Rajasthan and Howrah District, India. The researcher has collected data and analysed the data with the help of comparative case study and pilot study. The researcher found child marriage custom in Bhilwara district of Rajasthan, women discrimination and widows. Researcher also found different domestic violence lack of education. In the rural areas of Howrah District, women are backward in many ways due to lack of education and financial hardship. As a result, women do not show much skill in empowerment.

2.1. Research Gap

Although women’s empowerment has been discussed in previous topics, the empowerment of Toto women has not been mentioned here. Issues such as women’s education, women’s ability to engage in work and deprivation of equal rights have been discussed in women’s empowerment. But no one mentioned about the empowerment that Toto women have also empowered. Here I take the topic of “Empowerment of Toto Women and Inclusion of Toto Women in Socio-Culture” as a research gap.

3. Research Methodology

The present study researcher used books, articles, journals, universities news, experts’ opinion, website, field visit and census of last two decades. Present study will be adopted a Descriptive and documentary study based on secondary data.

4. Discussion

The empowerment of women in the Toto community and how the inclusion of women in society and culture is gaining prominence is discussed below:

4.1. Women Empowerment of Toto Community

In Toto society, women are seen primarily as friends and wives. Toto women play the role of friends before or after marriage. Later on, their role becomes that of a mother through various marital and family duties. Later in married life they play their role in society as wives. It must be mentioned here that the complexity, brutality, cruelty in the modern society, especially the killing of brides, the destruction of female fetuses, the torture, insults, torture, even beating or burning of women even after marriage, for the demand of dowry, are the cases that we see. In the life of Pai primitive tribal Toto society, there is no case of women facing that condition till date. In Toto society, there is no wife killing, in this society boys and girls are treated equally. The girl says there is no question of neglect from a young age. There is no torture in the demand of betting because there is no system of betting in this society. There is no incest. Widow marriage has been prevalent in this society since ancient times. So, there is no insult, insult or movement in that regard either.

In Toto society they lead a very simple and ordinary life in marital and family life. Women in general are held in high esteem and respect in this society. There is no doubt that people of Toto society are very backward in terms of finance and education. But in family life, men and women work equally hard to complement each other in various household tasks. Animal husbandry along with agriculture is the main livelihood of the Totos and in this work the men as well as the women of the family come forward equally. It is natural for women to work equally as men's partners in agriculture or their leading role in animal husbandry. Women almost single-handedly collect firewood or fruits and vegetables from the forest. Toto women can cut firewood, chop wood, cut grass, plant marua, mow, thresh, make Haria (Eu), cut hay, catch fish as well as men or as partners with men. In a word, housework, outdoor work, all Toto women are not behind in Toto society. There is no job that Toto women can't do. They can do everything. Yet Toto women lag far behind men. For this reason, it can be said that since many years ago Toto did not want to teach the girls of the society. They did not want girls to learn and become independent then. At home, girls were made to work more in housework. The ancestors of the Totos had a little saying – girls should get married when they grow up, after marriage they will go to their husband's house, what about teaching girls and let them work. But the idea that they can't learn without homework has changed in today's Toto society. Although the population is very small, now Toto girls from almost every house are going to school, going to college and girls from many houses are taking and passing the secondary examination. Also learning to play football, volleyball, karate. Girls are more interested in learning new songs and dances in Toto language. Toto girls are now studying far away from home. Sona Toto, Shanti Toto is studying in Kolkata along with other jobs and Sanchita Toto works in Tata Consultancy Services in Kolkata. Due to their motivation, Toto girls now have the motivation and morale to move forward in other activities including education. Nowadays, Toto girls are studying in English medium outside the Toto neighbourhood and the interest in education among Toto girls is visible.

4.2. Social and Cultural inclusion of women in Toto Community

Apart from marital and family work, Toto girls also participate in social activities. Totos have their own social organization. Five posts are named to govern the Toto society 1) Kaiji (Priest), 2) Gappu (Mural), 3) Panchayat (Mukhya), 4) Pau (Ojha) 5) Nampan. After the election of Panchayats, the post of Panchayat has disappeared in Toto society. Once out of these five posts, Pooja Toto of Pujagaon was elected assistant to Pau. In Toto language it is called Hongtong. The election of Pooja Toto as a woman in this social organization is definitely a remarkable thing. After the introduction of Gram Panchayat elections in West Bengal, Roma Toto became the first female Gram Panchayat member from Toto Para. Currently Pilpilli Toto is elected as Gram Panchayat member. Both of them were elected as members of Toto Para Ballalaguri Gram Panchayat and have served and are still doing so. In Toto society many forms of worship are performed indoors. As Kool Pooja says 'Choisun' in Toto language. Besides 'Jirongkobe', and 'Sangko-Manka' are worshipped. Outside the house 'Sataring', 'Jiding', 'Kungri', 'Baraigari-Nuche', basically Bhumi Puja. Mountain worship 'Paduwa', and river worship 'Torsha-mere-madhi', 'Lapu-vinti', 'Dangtenati-hainti', and stone worship 'Birkochaisu', 'Paking sawa' etc. They perform pujas throughout the year at different times to survive from the hands of different gods. And Toto women have a special role in all these puja-parbans. On the one hand, as they prepare food for worship, help in collecting other materials, similarly, small women especially play an important role as assistants to men in making Hariya (Eu) for the purpose of worship. Only Gowati Puja (River Puja) cannot be attended by girls. Girls are not allowed to participate in this puja due to menstruation. But when the men come back home after the puja, it is these Toto women who welcome them with 'Eu'.

The universal group worships of the Totos are Mayu Puja, Omchu Puja, Sarad Puja and Chaisan-Choira. Mayu and Omchu festivals are the biggest puja festivals of the Totos. On this occasion, the Toto women have a special presence and role in various events organized in the Demsa of the Totos. They participate in the Demsa Puja in dance-songs and all sing together. All men and women join in the joyous festival. Note that Toto girls have only one specific dance called 'Chichiwa'. Omchu and Mayu Puja require a large quantity of Hariya (U). It is the women who are responsible for preparing and carrying the Hariya during this time. It is also the women who take Hariya to relatives (wife's close relatives) houses. Women can be members of Demsa. Although the population of the Toto community is very small, boys as well as girls now go to school from almost every home. And the first guardians and encouragers of this work are Toto women, Toto mothers. Girls play a special role as the first parents

in bringing up young boys and girls together as equals. Mother's role is the biggest role in this. In short, mothers are the first and foremost guardians of children.

Although there is a patriarchal society, the Toto women of this society are highly respected. Although the head of the family is a man, they consult with their wives about various matters of the world. Married men in this society give considerable importance to the opinion of their wives. Even in a male-dominated society, the women of this Toto society are directly involved in the production of the society like every woman in other tribal communities. In a patriarchal society, sons exclusively owned property but daughters could not share in the property. But now many old customs have been reformed and a new thinking has started regarding property rights of girls. It can be said that with many changes in Toto society at present, there has been a lot of awareness to move forward in other fields including girls' education. In this way, women in the Toto society are able to show their empowerment and women are being included in the social and cultural context of the Toto community.

5. Findings

The following are the issues that the researcher found in his study regarding women's empowerment and the social and cultural inclusion of women in the Toto community:

- i. **Social Status:** Women in the Toto community face socio-cultural barriers, including limited access to education and decision-making.
- ii. **Economic Empowerment:** Initiatives such as microfinance and financial inclusion have had a positive impact on women's empowerment, enabling them to participate in community development and improve their economic status.
- iii. **Community Participation:** Empowered women have been involved in all community activities and women have been continuously contributing to increasing social capital and inclusive development.
- iv. **Challenges:** The community faces challenges such as marginalization, discrimination, and limited access to resources, which hinder women's empowerment and socio-cultural inclusion.
- v. **Empowerment Strategies:** Effective strategies to promote women's empowerment include increasing women's education and skills to improve their socio-economic status.
- vi. **Financial Inclusion:** Women play an equal role in providing access to financial services and economic participation.
- vii. **Community involvement:** Encouraged women's participation in community decision-making and development initiatives.
- viii. **Social support:** Women implemented support mechanisms to address socio-cultural barriers and promote women's empowerment.

These findings can inform policies and initiatives aimed at promoting women's empowerment and socio-cultural inclusion within the Toto community.

6. Conclusion

Research on women empowerment and socio-cultural inclusion in Toto community reveals that women empowerment is crucial for their socio-cultural inclusion and community development. Despite various advances in Toto society, women in Toto community face challenges such as limited access to education, healthcare and decision-making opportunities. Women have adapted effective empowerment strategies to the unique cultural context of the community. Everyone should come forward to address specific challenges and implement initiatives to promote women empowerment. Encouraging women's participation in community decision-making and development and improving their socio-economic status is definitely necessary to increase women's education and skills. By giving women an opportunity to highlight their empowerment in this way, women will take the Toto community society further forward. Without women empowerment and women's education, no society can be developed. Therefore, above all, if all women are included in all fields by providing equal opportunities to women, not only the society but the whole country and the world will change.

Acknowledgment: No

Author's Contribution: Subrata Sarkar: Data Collection, Literature Review, Methodology, Analysis, Drafting, Referencing

Funding: No

Declaration: Not Applicable

Competing Interest: No

References

1. Banerjee, T. (2007). Toto Upajtir Itikatha, *Department of Folklore*, Kalyani University. <http://hdl.handle.net/10603/213463>
2. Biswas, Dr. A. K. (2019). *Socio-Economic Profile of Toto Tribe*. Aayu Publication.
3. Biswas, A.K. (2020). Impact of Development on PVTGs in India: A Case Study of Toto Tribe in West Bengal. *Disadvantaged Tribes of India: Regional Concern*, 260-278. <https://www.academia.edu/45018785>
4. Das, A. (2021). Society and Culture of Toto Tribe after Colonial Period. *International Journal of Science and Research*, 10(02), 439-443. <https://www.ijsr.net/archive/v10i2/SR21206014153.pdf>
5. Dawn, A. (2014). A Peep the Lifestyle of the Endangered Toto Tribe of Jalpaiguri District of West Bengal. *International Journal of Modern Research and Reviews*, 2(4), 161-163. <https://journalijmrr.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Anandita-Dawn161-164.pdf>

6. Ghosh, K.S. (2020). A Study on the Empowerment of Women Enrolled in the MSW Course under Netaji Subhas Open University, *Ugc-Deb Project*, Netaji Subhash Open University, 1-25. https://sps.wbnsou.ac.in/publication/research_reports/20210621
7. Jithu, T.V. (2018). Empowerment through Employment: A Study among the Women Auto-Rickshaw Drivers. *International Journal of Science and Research*, 8 (11), 1366-1369. <https://www.ijsr.net/archive/v8i11/ART20202669.pdf>
8. Koushiki, & G. Dr. S. (2023). How Empowered are Women: A Social-Legal Study of the Position and Status of Women in the Indian Society, *Russian Law Journal*, 11(6), 86-97. <https://www.russianlawjournal.org/index.php/journal/article/view/3296>
9. Nath, P. (2017). *Ekus Shatake To-To Samaj O Sanskriti*. Anima Prakashani. West Bengal.
10. Nath, P. (2022). *Adim Adibasi TOTO*. Terakota, West Bengal.
11. Nath, P. (2023). *Adim Janajati Toto Samaj Jibone Nari*, Akhon Duars, West Bengal.
12. Patnaik, N. (2017). Odisha Marching Ahead Towards Women Empowerment Through SHGs. *Odisha Review*, 50-55. <https://magazines.odisha.gov.in/orissareview/2017/November/engpdf/50-55.pdf>
13. Sarkar, S. (2015). The Socio-Economic Status and Education of the Toto Community with Special Reference to Madarihat Block in the District of Alipurduar in West Bengal, India. *Golden Research Thoughts*, 4(9), 1-8. <https://oldgrt.lbp.world/colorArticles/5320.pdf>

Publisher's Note

The Social Science Review A Multidisciplinary Journal remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published data, map and institutional affiliations.

©The Author(s) 2025. Open Access.

This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>