



Socio-Economic Empowerment of Tribal Women in Nilgiri District of Tamil Nadu - A Study on Toda Tribal Community

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Abstract

This study is focused on socio-economic empowerment of tribal women in Nilgiri district of Tamil Nadu. Data were collected from 110 women and analysed with the help of suitable statistical methods. Socio-economic status of tribal women plays a significant role in the economic development as they contribute in various economic activities. Tribal women work very hard for livelihood of the family but live a poor life, in spite of their many contributions in the house and on the farm. The result of the study has revealed that the level of education, occupational status, income, ownership and accessibility of banking services are the main obstacles to the socio-economic empowerment of tribal women.

Keywords:

Women Empowerment;
Socio-Economic Development;
Livelihood;
Level of Education; Ownership.

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1. Introduction

The word 'empower' arisen in the mid-17th century with legalistic meaning "to invest with authority, authorize", is not new. Shortly thereafter, it began to be used with an infinitive in a more general way, having the meaning to enable or permit. Both of these uses survive today but have been overpowered by the word's use in politics and pop psychology. Its modern use originated in the civil rights movements, which sought political empowerment for its followers. The word was then taken up by women's movement. In the feminist and development literature related to women and poverty issues this term began to be used in the 1980s. Little by little the idea of empowering women-mostly poor women in the third world- has been gaining importance in the agenda of NGOs, national governments and donor agencies like World Bank.

The term 'empowerment' is frequently heard today all over the world. It is clearly connected to the word 'Power'. The term 'power' in turn connotes control. In the context of human society, it means control over resources. The resources could be material such as skills, labour, or intellectual resources including information, ideas and knowledge etc. Power is relational dynamic between individual or between groups of people and is often unequally distributed. The inequality results in control or domination. Many a time the domination is accompanied by exploitation. An idea of empowerment may be invoked virtually in any context in speaking about human rights, about basic needs, about economic security, about capacity building or about existence. Empowerment is a process of acquiring rights, developing oneself independently (self-decision-making process). It is in fact that way of conscience, which paves the way for playing greater active role in all spheres of life and simultaneously to empower the persons to control and change the major works. In other words, it is a process which is directly related to power and to change of power, i.e. the power to control the resources and concepts.

Women empowerment is not a new concept in India. Several studies have been done before to see the status of women and empowerment of women as well. But there are very few studies conducted to find out the empowerment of tribal women. Particularly in Nilgiri Toda tribal women are extremely marginalised and are excluded from all the developmental activities when compared with other women / rural women. The term empowerment women can improve their capacity to earn income, efficiency and entrepreneurship. Empowerment have indicated that their decision making at all levels has improved, but how many of them

were from empowerment group was not taken into consideration previously. The proposed study has some extended scope than the earlier study done by the researcher. Hence, in the proposed study have focus is given entirely on empowerment of women.

2. Review of Literature

An important purpose of reviewing the literature is to interpret the present findings in the light of past results. A comprehensive review of literature becomes an integral part of any well conceived investigation as it provides the needed momentum to the research, and also guides the researcher in the right direction throughout the work. It facilitates the researcher to develop a comprehensive knowledge on the objectives and enable her to formulate concepts in the study and draw meaningful conclusions. A brief review of available literature is presented here: [1] have studied the micro-credit programs in Bangladesh indicates, the effect of a misguided understanding of empowerment and similarly flawed attempts to achieve it has been the disempowerment of women. There is now considerable reason to believe that micro-credit programs may in fact, serve to exacerbate gender hierarchies and reinforce the exploitation of women. Since this is completely antithetical to the stated objectives of empowerment, there is a clear need to re-evaluate current approaches to women's empowerment in development and the role of development interventionists in challenging patriarchal oppression. [3] have studied on both sides of the empowerment development nexus, and argues that the interrelationships are probably too weak to be self-sustaining, and that continuous policy commitment to equality for its own sake may be needed to bring about equality between men and women. Similarly, [2] have concluded that attaining development among all the pillars of sustainable development is unthinkable without empowering women and obtaining gender equality, thereby using the entire potential of the country. Thus, this study suggests that the government needs to work hard to change the existing position of women and achieve gender equality, which will have a positive spillover effect on the sustainable development of the country. Another study has revealed the traditional customs which were considered as the hurdles for women empowerment in the Nilgiris district of South India. The study states that the upliftment of women in tribal community brought a tremendous change in their economy. It has been evident that after the formation of SHG (Self help groups), there was a notable change in the status of tribal women. It has also been suggested that the government has to take positive measures in educating the girls of the upcoming generation in the tribal community. Another study was conducted by [8] the empowerment of tribal women for the accelerated socio-economic development of any community the active participation of women is essential. Tribal women play a significant role in the economic development of tribal as they contribute in various economic activities. Tribal women work very hard for livelihood of the family but live a poor life, in spite of their many contributions in the house and on the farm. The result of the study has revealed that lack of education, poor health status and infant mortality rate, low level of wage work, leadership quality are the main obstacles to the socio-economic empowerment of tribal women. [6] have found that by employing inclusive strategies, scientific technologies and participative approaches, the socially excluded women could be organized, engaged and integrated successfully by leveraging proven Lac-based livelihood model in the value chains and markets for increasing their incomes. The women demonstrated entrepreneurial abilities to handle markets and acquired economic empowerment over the incomes generated for family needs, mostly for education and health, while in some cases for assets building. The study provided ample evidence that disadvantaged women could be receptive, cooperative and capable of acquiring new skills and leadership responsibilities for value chain refinement, micro-enterprise development and management through appropriate training and skill building. [5] have found that the main cause of backwardness and poverty, as well as lack of education, the patriarchal system as such are the causes of the low status of tribal women, together with an inferiority complex, culture constraints, and lack of awareness. Thus, it can be concluded that the socio-economic status of tribal women is low, and policy makers and local development practitioners should design appropriate and effective policies and programs in this regard. [7] have studied the women empowerment is a vital instrument to expand women's ability to have resources and to make strategic life choices. It is found from the study that Tribal women play a vital role in the social empowerment of tribal area as they contribute in various social activities.

2. Research Method

Objectives

1. To study the socio-economic status of Toda Tribal Women in Nilgiri District.
2. To estimate the empowerment of Tribal Women through level of education, employment, income and ownership of selected respondents in the study area.

Methodology

Study Area

In Nilgiri district, the Todas have their own dialect called as Todas dialect, the lived in unique half-barrel shaped houses and their village or settlement which from 5 to 8 maximum 15 houses was called as “mund”, the Todas are living in sixty-one Munds. Todas are known by several names like Todas, Tuduvans, Toras and Todar. For the present study, 5 Toda Munds were selected. These Munds are inhabited only by the Todas. The Settlement pattern shows that some of Munds are having less than 5 households. The present study focused on Garden Mund, ManjakalMund, FurnelMund, TamizhagamMund and Glen Morgan Mund. The Toda population is very small compared to that of other tibial population of Nilgiris. The Todas main occupations are buffalo rearing, agriculture and embroidery. The literacy rate among Todas is very low. But some awareness improves their literacy rate 16.67 per cent in 1951 and 65.67 percent in 2011.

Sampling Design

The present study is empowerment of Toda Tribal women in Nilgiris and that to the village settlements where they live. The Todas live in 418 households in various settlements and their current population is 1480 including 695 are women. Out of 695 only 110 empowered women were selected from the 5 settlements namely, **Garden Mund, ManjakalMund, FurnelMund, TamizhagamMund and Glen Morgan Mund**, however, from each settlement 22 were selected by using convenient sampling method. Individuals who are the empowered women were interviewed to find out whether it has helped them in their empowerment in terms of their income, social status, political awareness, general awareness, participation and decision making, better livelihood and better access to resources etc.

Data Collection

Primary Data

In this analysis, both primary and secondary information was used. With the assistance of the interview schedule, primary data was gathered. Demographic variables, hamlet, decision-making, socio-cultural, service accessibility, ownership, and community engagement were included in the interview schedule. The researcher obtained all this information from the women respondents in the sample villages in different seasons during 2017-2018, detailed first-hand information.

Secondary Data

Secondary data have been collected from published sources of journals, books, Govt. reports and Govt. Departments like Adi-Dravidar and Tribal Welfare Department of Chennai, and Udhagamandalam, The District Forest Office, District Collector’s Office: Taluk Office; Panchayat Unions, District Statistical Department; Nilgiris Adivasi Welfare Association (NAWA); Rural Development Organization, Toda Nalavazhvu Sangam, Udhagamandalam and Tribal Research Centre – Ooty. For data and financial aid to the tribes, the researcher had depended on the nationalized commercial banks such as those of the Syndicate, Indian Overseas, Indian Bank and State Bank operative in the study area. For materials on women of the tribes concerned, the Toda women Welfare Association at Udhagamandalam and Tirchigadi respectively have been approached and data collected.

Tools of Analysis

Data from the women respondents were obtained for analysis by using basic statistical methods such as frequency, cross tabulation, chi-square, t-test used to interpret primary data. have employed to interpret primary information.

Limitations of the Study

The study confines itself with comparing the socio-economic empowerment of Toda tribal women. It cannot be claimed as a gender study in the sense of clarifying the socio discrimination between men and women of the same group. The research was carried out herself to find out the factors contributing to status of women in Toda tribal groups who are living in the different settlements. All other limitations have been avoided for the researcher convenience.

3. Results and Analysis

3.1. Socio-Economic Variables

1. The study found that distribution of age of the respondents are 67 (60.9 per cent) belongs to 18 – 35 years, 36 (32.7 per cent) are in 35 – 49 years and only 7 (6.4 per cent) are 50 and above have involved in empowerment.
2. Distribution of education among the respondents is 19 (17.3 per cent) illiterate, 10 (9.1 per cent) is Primary, 21 (19.1 per cent) are Matriculation, 47 (42.7 per cent) are Higher Secondary, 13 (11.8 per cent) are Graduate.
3. Out of 110 women respondents, the employment distribution have been divided into 34 (30.9 per cent) are not working in any organized sectors it means they are working in coolylabours, 56 (50.9 per cent) are self employed, 3 (2.7 per cent) are working in government sector, 13 (11.8 per cent) are working in private sector and 4 (3.6 per cent) in other specify.

4. The distribution of income is 15 (13.6 per cent) are Less than 3000-4000, 29 (26.4 per cent) are 4001 – 5000, 21 (19.1 per cent) 5001 – 6000 and 45 (40.9 per cent) are more than 6000 in the study area.
5. Ownership of assets in the study area are 82 (74.5 per cent) respondents are said YES and 28 (25.5 per cent) are not having any assets have said NO.
6. The distribution of bank account among the sample respondents are 91 (82.7 per cent) is said YES and 19 (17.3 per cent) is said NO.
7. Distribution of member of the different organizations like SHGs/NGOs/Adivasi Welfare Association etc. in different settlements is 102 (92.7 per cent) have answered YES and only 8 (7.3 per cent) are said NO.

3.2. Chi-Square Test

1. There is a positive association between the employment and members of the organization were found the Pearson chi-square value is 10.426, (df-3) and p value is .015 ($p < 5$) which means who are the continuity of employment or higher level of employment are actively participate in the women empowerment groups (H_0 - rejected H_1 – accepted).
2. Income and promote girls higher education is positively associated in Pearson chi-square value is 35.617 (df – 3) and p value is .000 ($p < 5$) which means who are the higher income category of Toda tribal community have promoting their girls higher education level (H_0 - rejected H_1 – accepted).
3. Education and bank account have also positively associated in Pearson chi-square value is 18.449 (df – 4) and p value is .001 ($p < 5$) which means higher the education level leads to higher the accessibility of banking services (H_0 - rejected H_1 – accepted).
4. Association between ownership and member of the organization is positively associated in Pearson chi-square value is 2.946 (df – 1) and p value is .086 ($p > 5$) which means ownership of the assets is highly associated with membership of the SHGs, NGOs and any empowerment groups (H_0 - rejected H_1 – accepted).

3.3. t-Test

1. The independent sample t-test have found that the difference between age of the respondents and member of the organization mean difference is 1.37 and 2.80 and the St. Deviation .506 and .926 respectively. In order to find out the Levene's test for equality of variance F is 13.956 (df – 7.331) t value is 3.405 and p value is .011 ($p < 5$) (H_0 - rejected H_1 – accepted).

4. Conclusion

Social and economic empowerment of Toda tribal women to a large extent depends on the educational attainment. Educated women will be able to face the present day society better than earlier times. In the present study, no one can remain completely isolated, but they are influenced by the growth of modern society and culture. Government is providing a lot of support and grant for the education of Tribal students. This will help to increase the literacy rate and it will lead to the right way to development.

The decision making and community level participation is explored to assess their awareness regarding their cultural obstacles and home violence, health, and lack of nutrients. Many times, they suffer from lack of services in community level and cultural level. Thus, increasing the literacy rate and providing opportunities for gainful employment for tribal women will be instrumental in bringing about a change in the status of tribal women in India and to handle to challenges successfully.

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