

The Investigating the Oppression of Toba Batak Women: Call for Empowerment and Woman Leadership

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Abstract

This research has been developed around the two contrasting views/themes of the *Toba Batak* women's oppression and call for women's empowerment and leadership. It initially explored the philosophy of the *Toba Batak* society while identifying the forces of *Toba Batak* women's suppression. It has been discovered that the *Toba Batak* women are subordinated because of an attitude or disposition dictated and perpetuated by the cultural belief systems, especially the social system of the clan (*marga*). Consequently, women are considered mere objects to men, particularly in childbearing to produce male children. In order to gather data and explore the problem more deeply, this research uses a case study and a qualitative method through a literature study. Rethinking *Toba Batak* kinship philosophy and practices through substitute liberating and non-discriminating practices in order to promote equality between men and women. This cultural analysis will create a more appropriate proposal for addressing women's subjection. A culturalist approach (like promoting newer beliefs through habitual alternative practices) may be similarly called forth to foster women empowerment.

Keywords: oppression; empowerment; patriarchal; toba batak

1. Introduction

This paper is an attempt to highlight the important aspect that leads to the inequality and marginalization of women in *Toba Batak*¹ society (*TBS*), including their exclusion from leadership roles. In *TBS*, many women experience discrimination and marginalization. Discrimination against women is rationalized by the patriarchal system which is persistent and enduring even to this day.² The role of the patriarchal system resulted in the gender-inequality which subordinate women in *TBS*. This paper will examine the persisting experiences of *Toba Batak* women in the society of North Sumatera, Indonesia. Through interviews conducted by researchers, there are many reasons obtained as the rationale for the oppression of *Toba Batak* women.

Gender inequality in social and political life remains a challenge for societies and institutions. Human attitudes being open and consciousness about identity as human beings with dignity and equality will afford the possibility for changes, especially cultural values, for instance, several women who were victims of injustice began to have an awareness that they were no longer victims but began to fight for justice for themselves as well as for other women. Women are starting to show that they also have the power to fight for gender equality.³ This situation is a great opportunity to promote empowerment and leadership for all without being limited by gender differences.

The strength and role of men who dominate in the family, as the implementation of patriarchal structures in culture is a global women experience. Saldanha also explained this in his research on the strong influence of the patriarchal structure in India which in itself weakened the position of women. She wrote that hierarchical power in the nuclear family is cultural the father acts as the head of the family and the mother as the caregiver. The role of the father as the head of the family, namely as a leader, is complemented by various reasons, namely men as the successor of the lineage and the owner of wealth.⁴ Culturally,

¹ The *Toba Batak* people, an ethnic group from North Sumatera, Indonesia, near the shores of Lake Toba, have a rigid patrilineal family structure. The *Toba Batak* lives in the Toba High lands in villages that mainly consist of the members of a lineage that is, the people who consider themselves descendants of the same grandfather (*sa-oppu*). Moses Elias Situmorang, *Samosir: Mutiara Cita Dan Cerita (Samosir: Its Pearl Dreams and Stories)* (Pangururan: Bina Media Perintis, 2009), 14.

² Vergouwen J.C., *The Social Organization and Customary Law of the Toba Batak of Northern Sumatra* (Netherlands: Publication Commissioned and Financed, 1964), 131–32.

³ Kochurani Abraham, “Freeing Power for Powering Freedom,” in *Liberating Power: Asian Feminist Theological Perspectives*, ed. Andrea Lizares Si and Jeane Peracullo (Bengaluru: Dharmaran Publications, 2019), 91.

⁴ Virginia Saldanha, “Feminist Power-Living the Gospel Outside Patriarchal Structures,” in *Liberating Power: Asian Feminist Theological Perspectives*, ed. Andrea Lizares Si and Jeane Peracullo (Bengaluru: Dharmaran Publications, 2019), 17.

the regime strengthened the patriarchal structure in *Toba Batak* society⁵ placing limits on the possibilities for *Toba Batak* women. The researchers propose pastoral action pastoral.

2. Research Methodology

This research investigates the oppression of *Toba Batak* women in order to convey empowerment and woman Leadership. This problem is an important circumstance to explore in order to build awareness and create opportunities for all, both men and women. To address this issue and gather the data and furthermore to analyze the problem comprehensively, this research uses a case study and a qualitative method through a literature study. Firstly, I will describe patriarchal times and discrimination against Women; secondly, I will outline the *Toba Batak* culture, which is the context for the oppression of *Toba Batak* women; Thirdly, family- a suppressive force of women in the *Toba Batak* society and finally I also discuss some recommendations for pastoral action pastoral that might be implemented to open understanding for empowerment and leadership for all, without being limited by gender distinction.

3. Research Results and Discussion

3.1 Patriarchal Times and Discrimination Against Women

According to my understanding, criticism of patriarchy is primarily concerned with anthropocentrism which results in an understanding that results in the phenomenon of gender blindness. It fails to uncover the sexist ideologies that operate in patriarchal and androcentric cultures.⁶ In the Western tradition, these sexist ideologies have their roots in ancient Greek Philosophy and Jewish religion. The former offers patriarchal anthropology, which looks at women as inferior to men in all things.⁷ The convergence of these two traditions in Western Christianity has perpetuated women's oppression in history.⁸

In my opinion, discrimination against women rationalized by the patriarchal system still continues to occur in society even in modern times. The patriarchal system has put a structure whereby women are not only victimized but also

⁵ *Toba Batak* society refers to the group of *Toba Batak* people sharing a common culture, including language, pattern of thinking, norms of behavior and cultural forms. Doangsa Situmeang, *Dalihan Na Tolu Sistem Sosial Kemasyarakatan Batak-Toba (Dalihan Na Tolu Social System of Toba Batak Society)* (Jakarta: Kerabat, 2007), 32–33.

⁶ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Integrating Ecofeminism Globalization and World Religious* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, inc, 2005), 25.

⁷ Agustina Prasetyo Murniati, "The Human Face of the Church in Indonesia: Indonesian Christian Women's Hope," in *Ecclesia of Women in Asia: Gathering the Voices of the Silenced*, ed. Evelyn Monteiro and Antoinette Gutzler (Delhi: ISPCK, 2005), 210.

⁸ Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville, Kentucky: John Know Press, 2005), 46.

penalized as victims.⁹ Drawing on Beauvoir's book, "The Ethics of Ambiguity," especially the situation of women in the patriarchal times and classical antiquity of women in general who have been forced to occupy a secondary place in society.¹⁰ Women have no right to take any decision making for themselves and family. All decision-making is being forced under the control of men as the head of the family.¹¹

In her book, Beauvoir was explaining as to how the patriarchal system has power against women and women were dethroned by the authority of men. During the time of the patriarchal period, men wrested from women all their rights to possess and bequeath property.¹² They can only submit to the laws, the gods, the customs, and the truths created by the males. Pui-lan an Asian Feminist who wrote from the first Asian Women's Consultation on Inter-faith Dialogue, explain similarity with the previous feminist thinker regarding how the world of religions in the Asian context had been practicing discriminatory laws and religious practice against women, the limitation of women's leadership and ritualistic roles. She affirms, "as a result of this religious discrimination, women of all religions continue to be marginalized and discriminated against at the societal level".¹³ The opinions and arguments of feminist thinkers are true to the facts that are happening on the ground, especially in the *Toba Batak* culture which is very strict in realizing cultural values that adhere to patriarchy.

3.2. Toba Batak Culture and the Oppression against Toba Batak Women

The *TBS* with the patriarchal system places men as the head of the family and has full authority over the women. For example, the marriage event the *Toba Batak* tribe naturally gives strength and power to the men.¹⁴ For the sake dignity of the family, particularly of the men's side, a marriage can be performed even if, in fact, the women were not ready to marry. In this situation, the foundation of marriage is not pure love, but an imposition.¹⁵

⁹ Cornelius F. Murphy, *Beyond Feminism: Toward a Dialogue on Difference* (United States of America: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 7.

¹⁰ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. Bernard Frenchman (New York: Kensington Publishing Corp, 1948), 37.

¹¹ Murphy, *Beyond Feminism: Toward a Dialogue on Difference*, 17; No Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals: Critical Feminist Ekklesia-Logos of Liberation* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 19.

¹² Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 49.

¹³ Kwok Pui-lan, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology* (England: Cromwell Press, 2000), 47.

¹⁴ Charly Silaban, "Boru Raja, Sebuah Konsep Priyayi Perempuan Batak (The Women as a King, an Aristocracy Concept Toba Batak Women)," 2008, <http://www.silaban.net/2008/01/17/boru-raja-sebuah-konsep-priyayi>.

¹⁵ Situmeang, *Dalihan Na Tolu Sistem Sosial Kemasyarakatan Batak-Toba (Dalihan Na Tolu Social System of Toba Batak Society)*, 56.

The impropriety of women is affirmed in the philosophy of the *Toba Batak* tribe, “Sipatogu parik ni halak di anggo borua”¹⁶ which means “Women only strengthen the wall of others.” Others here are her husband and family. This situation brings the low status of women in her family and society. This mentality among the *Toba Batak* considers and encourages men to be superior. Discrimination against women is rationalized by patriarchal system which is persistent and enduring. The patriarchal system has put a structure where women are not only victimized but also penalized as victims. Behavoir said: “culturally, the regime strengthened the patriarchal structure in society by placing limits on the possibilities for the women.”¹⁷ These are because of the role of patriarchy in gender inequality.¹⁸

In society, the male desire to dominate women and make women as inferior figures. This situation is reflected in the thinking of some theologians. For example, St. Thomas Aquinas with the Aristotelian principle said: the superior has to govern the inferior.”¹⁹ Ruether said that, “the primary social base for male monopolization of culture, by which men reinforced their privileges of leisure, the superior prestige of their activities and the inferiority of the activities associated with women.”²⁰

I think this perspective was creating problems in the world. Human beings always think of themselves, they have “intrinsic values” in themselves and the other creations do not have value in themselves. The other creation only has “instrumental value.”²¹ In the relationship between men and women, men perceived women as “weak souls” and in constant need of male protection. This became an opportunity for men to dominate women completely.²²

Based on my interview and library research, I can emphasize that in the *TBS*, the women are out of the house after getting married and parents can expect very little help from their daughters after marriage, whereas the son will remain at home. In a patriarchal culture, these arrangements are normal. The idea of *Toba Batak* on the patriarchal system is supported by their philosophy. *Toba Batak*

¹⁶ Situmorang, *Samosir: Mutiara Cita Dan Cerita (Samosir: Its Pearl Dreams and Stories)*, 26.

¹⁷ Behavoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 45.

¹⁸ Behavoir, 49.

¹⁹ Reynaldo D. Raluto, *Theologies of Creation/Environmental Ethics: The Catholic Ecological Teaching* (Quezon City: St. Vincent School of Theology, 2014), 1.

²⁰ Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Ecofeminism: Symbol and Social Connections of the Oppression of Women and the Domination of Nature,” *Feminist Theology*, 1995, 36.

²¹ Robert Sirico, *Environmental Stewardship in the Judeo-Christian Tradition: Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant Wisdom on the Environment* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, 2007), 69.

²² Behavoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 66.

people say, “Anakkonki do hamoraon di ahu,”²³ which means “the child is the precious treasure for the family.” This philosophy gave the privileged to men and this privilege made oppression and suffering to *Toba Batak* women, for example, a man had married a woman, and if the woman cannot give birth to a son or sons for him, then the man has the freedom to get married again with another woman.²⁴

This is a tradition held by *Toba Batak* and a practice that is profitable to the man. In these situations, all the family’s properties can be used by all people who are members of such a family. In the event of divorce, the woman does not have any right to receive any property of her husband.²⁵ With the advent of patriarchal institutions, men can easily say that what they need is a descendant. This kind of thinking is still clinging in the hearts and minds of men and this affects how men are behaving towards women. This result will exert a huge amount of pressure and fear to the women, the conception to decide the child whether is a boy or a girl is beyond their control. The women are regarded only as means for procreation and thus are made weak and only as receivers.

The degrading of women by the patriarchal system against the aim of finding identity intact and unique human dignity.²⁶ All human beings are defined by the world and relationships with and for others. In a relationship, everyone should put someone else in the same status. Putting others in equal status is a necessary condition to find a good ethical and honest life.²⁷ Situations of life such as this must be the desire and aspiration of every person. To live in peace with other people and harmony with nature require maturity, justice and gentle attitude to find a meaningful life. Ruether has explain the relationship between men and women should be done as follows:

The direct, natural, necessary relation of human creatures in the relation of man to women, the nature of this relation determines to what point man himself is to be considered as a generic being, as mankind; the relation of man to woman is the most natural relation of a human being to the human being.²⁸

The Toba Batak women are victims of the patriarchal system that marginalizes them in a situation of inequality and suffering. This is the result of the patriarchal and patrilineal socio-political system of the clan system and its oppressive culture of gender inequality. According to Behavoir, “In truth, a

²³ Mrs. Meriati Naibaho of Lau Rambong, North Sumatra-Indonesia, interview by the researcher on the 26th February 2023; Situmeang, *Dalihan Na Tolu Sistem Sosial Kemasyarakatan Batak-Toba (Dalihan Na Tolu Social System of Toba Batak Society)*, 79.

²⁴ Mrs. Meriati Naibaho of Lau Rambong, North Sumatra-Indonesia, interview by the researcher on the 24th February 2023; Situmeang, 82.

²⁵ Situmorang, *Samosir: Mutiara Cita Dan Cerita (Samosir: Its Pearl Dreams and Stories)*, 35.

²⁶ Behavoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 68.

²⁷ Behavoir, 68.

²⁸ Ruether, *Integrating Ecofeminism Globalization and World Religious*, 130.

woman has not been socially emancipated through man's need-sexual desire and the desire for offspring which makes the male dependent for satisfaction upon the female."²⁹ Discrimination and gender inequality are partly the results of the patriarchal system. However, these issues are institutionalized in *Toba Batak* society. This is also evident where the roles of women are involved. The clan system has effectively muted the participation of women especially to make decisions in the family. Women's voice is not important in the decision-making of the family.³⁰

3.3. Family - A Suppressive Force of Women in the *Toba Batak* Society

Feminist thinkers do well on the patriarchal system as the force of suppression and discrimination. However, they somehow neglect to realize the nature of the family a community with some arrangement, having some basic rules and a social organizational system. On the other hand, they may have understood it the other way around, meaning to say the patriarchal system influences the family. The family structure influences the social organizational structures and systems of which patriarchy is but one example.

Family is said to be the most basic unit or first social structure or system. The family is the first place to exercise the practice of dominion, discrimination, and suppression of females. I would like to point out that it is in the family unit that such suppressive or discriminative attitudes are cultivated, promoted, and practiced. All the examples in this section will serve the sole purpose of pointing out or giving evidence that suppression and discrimination in the family. From the researcher's observation in the field research, Mrs. Meriati shares her life experience.³¹ I summarized her life experience as follows:

I grew up in the *Toba Batak* family. I was born in a big family of seven siblings of four women and three men. I am the second child. The first child is also a woman and the third and fourth children are male. My parents are farmers. My parents have very clearly taught us how to behave in accordance with our customary norms. My sister and I must always be gentle, doing homework, like cleaning the house, cooking, washing, ironing, and so on. My third and fourth's sibling are male. They enjoyed playing with their friends and after returning home, my eldest sister and me has an obligation to provide soap, towels, and clothes before they go to take a bath. If my sister or I tried to express our opinion and asked why our two younger

²⁹ Behavoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 72.

³⁰ Situmeang, *Dalihan Na Tolu Sistem Sosial Kemasyarakatan Batak-Toba (Dalihan Na Tolu Social System of Toba Batak Society)*, 98.

³¹ Mrs. Meriati Naibaho of Lau Rambong, North Sumatra-Indonesia, interview by the researcher on the 26th February 2023.

brothers are not involved work in our home, my mother always said that cleaning up the house and serving is my responsibility and my sister's too. My mother clearly highlights that all tasks in the house is women's responsibility. I disagreed about it and I surely continue to propose that my younger brothers also should participate in the work of the house. Then, my mother will be angry and even punish me. She further says that without my brother's presence, my life as woman has no meaning. Therefore, we must serve them. Another thing, in choosing the game, we are very distinguished. My mother bought me dolls and cooking utensils, whereas for my younger brothers, my mother would buy a toy pistol or toy car. It was conscious or unconscious this game also demands a different attitude. In playing, my sister and I played inside the house. So that we played with a silenced mood and mom can easily call us when she needs our help. Thus, while playing, we remain committed to the task of the mother. While the two younger brothers, play in the square. In short, they played outside the house. They can run around, shout, and laugh freely. They played without any disturbed by our mother.³²

Through the experience of Mrs. Meriati, there are several important points that the researcher can conclude. First, the initial process of cultural value forming and different attitudes and behaviors between men and women takes place first and foremost in the family. What needs to be reflected is that family is a starting point of habitation in training, formation, and cultivating an inner attitude in the way of setting gender attributes. Socialization takes place with a series of rewards and punishments within the family setting before it goes out to the community and society. Murray in his book "*The Law of the Father*" asserts that the parents in a patriarchal culture would expect their daughters to be silent and not make a scene in a state where boys would be expected to be noisy.³³

Boys were given the freedom to play outdoors while girls have to play inside the house. This is an indication that men will have the opportunity to work outside while the women will continue the everyday task inside the house. The socialization theory process is a powerful approach to advocate that gender transformations are biological inheritance.³⁴ This is consistent with the concept of patriarchy interpreted by contemporary feminist scholars referring the gender

³² Mrs. Meriati Naibaho of Lau Rambong, North Sumatra-Indonesia, interview by the researcher on the 26th February 2023.

³³ Mary Murray, *The Law of the Father: Patriarchy in the Transition Form Feudalism to Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 93.

³⁴ Murray, 93.

imbalance create men are dominant and women are subordinate.³⁵ Lawrence emphasizes that “under patriarchy, it is the task of the mother to induct her daughter into the role of second-class citizen. She may not do this in overt ways, but rather through the detail of the relationship she sets up. Like herself, her daughter must orientate herself towards meeting the needs of others.”³⁶

It is true that the figure of a mother should be responsible for all her children, both girls, and boys, but consciously or subconsciously a mother sometimes had performed attitudes indifferent. It is the root cause of inheriting the "deterrent attitude" toward girls in the family. It starts from that point that the mother has a free choice whether simply continued this cultural values. Therefore, consciously, or unconsciously, the oppression and injustice experienced by the mother will be transmitted to her daughter.³⁷ Since, a mother is a close associate to the children, the stage of planting suppression/discrimination through the mother's role is very effective. Therefore, in this family system the discriminative ideology implanted is very solid in the human consciousness. This kind of practice continues to be preserved from generation to generation.³⁸ Grenfell elaborates on the work of Bourdieu to say that, “the cultural heritage we all possess and the consequences it held for us.”³⁹

The language and concepts of cultural belief are conceptualized and structured in a nuclear family unit in order to convince the girls, that their brothers are very important. For example, Meriati's mother expresses to her daughter saying, "without your brothers presence, your life as a woman has no meaning."⁴⁰ This verdict evidently shows the significance of men. It is increasingly apprehensive because a mother who may be very respectful of cultural values repeats this judgment. In addition, the pattern of speaking provides moral support and absolute power of men against women. Thus, this attitude supports this practice by "promoting the image of men and the masculine view of the world at the expense of women."⁴¹

Because of this behavior, female siblings are unable to think beyond the male important worldview. A study by Vergouwen found that the way the language is governed in conversations and traditions of customs despite the disadvantage of

³⁵ Anne Witz, *Professions and Patriarchy* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 2.

³⁶ Marilyn Lawrence, “Women’s Psychology, and Feminist Social Work Practice,” in *Women, Oppression and Social Work: Issues in Anti-Discriminatory Practice*, ed. Mary Langan and Lesley Day (New York: Routledge, 1992), 36.

³⁷ Lawrence, 37.

³⁸ Lawrence, 95.

³⁹ Michael Grenfell, *Pierre Bourdieu Agent Provocateur* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 89.

⁴⁰ Mrs. Meriati Naibaho of Lau Rambong, North Sumatra-Indonesia, interview by the researcher on the 26th February 2023.

⁴¹ Murray, *The Law of the Father: Patriarchy in the Transition Form Feudalism to Capitalism*, 101.

women, women as the injured party would receive resignation.⁴² In fact, the habit of promoting male cultural values performed by the *Toba Batak* people also occurs elsewhere.

3.4. Recommendations for Pastoral Action

This research recommends as the first priority for further study and pastoral action is the turn to the family as a venue for the promotion of respect and equality. Turning to the family as the basis and center of learning positive values, the second Vatican council elaborates, “The family is, as it were, the primary mother and nurse of this education. The proper forms of human culture impress themselves in an almost unconscious manner upon the mind of the developing adolescence.”⁴³ Having presented the family as a very crucial domestic Church and the first school of positive values, this research recommends the followings, rethinking *Toba Batak’s* philosophy about family, the triple dialogue of FABC, and Family Life Apostolate for pastoral action in the *TBS*.

3.4.1. Re-Thinking *Toba Batak* Philosophy about Family

Re-thinking the *Toba Batak* philosophy about family as advocacy for addressing the suppression and discrimination of women. The new understanding shall be the social structures and social systems exist to serve equality of every person. This research observes that when a baby is born into a family, he or she grows within this family structure that bears the *Toba Batak* culture. This study observes that even if the social structures are suppressive or discriminative, but they still uphold it or even such social structures are imposed into the common people by those who hold the position of authority in the community. This implies that individuals exist to serve these social structures. They must follow its rules, norms, and regulations even if they disagrees they must maintain it even if they are the victims of its implementations. This is the reality in the case of the *TBS* in Indonesia which is the subject of this research.

According to my interpretation rethinking the *Toba Batak* philosophy is an attempt to revisit the philosophy, especially about the family. The character cultivation to promote life and cooperation occur in the family. This further requires that we must be prepared to invent life-giving ones that promote equality of males and females. The researcher argues that change is a necessary condition of life. Thus, making changes to the *Toba Batak* philosophy and cultural practices is healthy and necessary. All of these are for the cultivation of the life-giving aspects of culture, philosophy, and human life in the *TBS*. It may be pointed out that a society that does not open to change is doomed to out datedness and could

⁴² Vergouwen, 41.

⁴³ James H. Kroeger, *The Documents of Vatican Council II* (Pasay City: Paulines Publishing House, 2011), 61.

eventually die out. To balance out our outlook, some changes are destructive and have negative effects on the life of human beings. However, the kind of change that this research is calling for is a change to allow for the growth of equality, respectful cooperation, empowerment, and woman leadership.

3.4.2. Dialogue with Culture from the Light of FABC: Triple Dialogue

The first FABC Plenary Assembly developed this perspective on dialogue into a call for a triple dialogue with the Asian cultures, religions, and immense multitude of the poor. This first Assembly emphasized that the primary focus of the task of Evangelization in Asia is to build up the truly local Church. So, the Bishops proposed a triple dialogue and announced that this was a new method of Evangelization. Any dialogue, they said, requires that those in dialogue be open to other religions. The triple dialogue they propose is a dialogue with cultures, with religions, and with the poor.

I consider that dialogue should be fostered at all levels, for example, the family, the grassroots ecclesial communities, schools, youth groups, convents, seminaries, and religious formation houses. The basic dialogue on these levels is what the Bishops call a dialogue of life. It focuses more on interpersonal dialogue which means dialogue from the heart to the soul of the person. For Asian Church, a triple dialogue has been proposed by the Asian Bishop's conference which the dialogue with the religions, culture and poor are never ending.

Dialogue with culture is the mission of liberation of women in *Toba Batak* society. In his introduction, James H. Kroeger made a theological reflection on the FABC about the mission of the church in Asia. He says that "The vision of FABC for the Church in Asia is to be in Triple dialogue-dialogue with the poor, with cultures, and with religions."⁴⁴ He further clarifies that "The FABC asserts that the pathway for the Church in Asia to truly discover in a three-fold dialogue: with Asian peoples (especially the poor) [Integral development], Asian cultures [inculturation], and Asian Religions [interfaith dialogue]."⁴⁵

In responding to it, the leaders of the Indonesia community always try to encourage the Congregation to enter into dialogue as seen in these pastoral letters:

We need to develop a spirit of brotherhood and equality among cultural ethnic, religious, and faith communities, as a frame of reference for co-existence in Indonesia. There is a concern for the

⁴⁴ James Thoppil, *Towards an Asian Ecclesiology: The Understanding of the Church in the Documents of the FABC (1970-2000)* (Shillong: Oriens Publications, 2005), 93.

⁴⁵ Thoppil, 115.

fate of others, particularly those who are neglected, poor, and weak, including the defense of children and women's rights.⁴⁶

The Bishops' Conference of Indonesia sees that the basic method of the proclamation of the Gospel is a dialogue with culture. Dialogue with culture is called Inculturation.⁴⁷ According to Darmaatmaja, the Archbishop of Jakarta, "Inculturation is the dynamic relationship between the Indonesian Church and its own culture, which is the culture of its own people."⁴⁸

3.4.3. Inculturation

This research recommends inculturation as a way forward for rethinking the *Toba Batak* Philosophy. According to the New Dictionary of Theology, "Inculturation, a new term used in theology, refers to the central and dynamic principle governing the Christian missionary outreach to the peoples not yet evangelized, or among whom the Church is not yet rooted firmly and indigenously".⁴⁹ The use of the word is the consequence of two basic characteristics stated by the Second Vatican Council: its emphasis on the churches mission to the world and on the role and importance of culture. This concern with culture led to a more specific understanding of the church's mission."⁵⁰ According to Dwyer, "This emphasis of Vatican II on the Church's mission to the world and the important role of culture in human affairs led Paul VI in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* affirm that culture must be the chief concern of the church's missionary activity."⁵¹ Dwyer says that "It seems that the word was first introduced by Cardinal Sin of Manila at the synod on Catechesis in Rome in

⁴⁶ The Bishops Conference of Indonesia (KWI), "Laporan Departemen Pengembangan Sumber Daya Manusia Dan Pelayanan Umum Dan Tenaga Gereja (Update from the Department of Human Resources and General Service and the Church Employee)," in *Spektrum*, vol. XL (Jakarta: Departemen Dokumentasi Dan Penerangan KWI, 2012), 46.

⁴⁷ Inculturation means: all the efforts made by the Church to preach the Gospel values in the culture. Inculturation allows Churches see the positive values that exist in a culture that could be developed in the appreciation of the faith.

⁴⁸ The Bishops Conference of Indonesia (KWI), "Laporan Departemen Pengembangan Sumber Daya Manusia Dan Pelayanan Umum Dan Tenaga Gereja (Update from the Department of Human Resources and General Service and the Church Employee)," 23.

⁴⁹ Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins, and Dermot A. Lane, eds., *The New Dictionary of Theology* (Collegville, Minnesota: A Michael Glazier Book, The Liturgical Press, 1987), 510; Mario Saturno Dias, *Rooting Faith in Asia: Source Book for Inculturation* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2005), 79.

⁵⁰ Judith A. Dwyer, ed., *The New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought* (Collegville, Minnesota: A Michael Glazier Book, The Liturgical Press, 1994), 482; Emanuel J Embu and Amatus Woi, eds., *Berpastoral Di Tapal Batas (Mission on Border)* (Mauere: Ledalero, 2004), 34.

⁵¹ Embu and Woi, *Berpastoral Di Tapal Batas (Mission on Border)*, 34.

1977 and was first used in an official papal document by John Paul II in his apostolic exhortation on catechesis in October 1979.”⁵²

Having presented the brief background of the term, inculturation recommended here in this research will be treated from the perspective of mission of the Church in Asia by the FABC, triple dialogue: dialogue with the poor, dialogue with religions, and especially dialogue with cultures.

John Paul II speaks about the importance of inculturation in Ecclesia in Oceania saying: The process is the gradual way in which the Gospel is incarnated in the various cultures. On the one hand, certain cultural values must be transformed and purified, if they are to find a place in a genuinely Christian culture. On the other hand, in various cultures Christian values readily take root. Inculturation is born out of respect for both the Gospel and the culture in which it is proclaimed and welcomed.⁵³

Pope Francis stresses that: “In a culture which privileges dialogue as a form of encounter, it is time to devise a means for building conscious and agreement while seeking the goal of a just, responsive and inclusive society.”⁵⁴ Thus this research recommends dialogue with culture especially the *Toba Batak* culture as the church’s mission in Indonesia. Mercado further clarifies: “Inculturation is the dynamic relationship between the Christian message and culture or cultures. It is an ongoing process of reciprocal and critical interaction and assimilation between them.”⁵⁵

By the way, inculturation in this context refers to the fact that the *Toba Batak* culture must be open to accepting and adopting biblical values, especially the Gospels in a bid to transform and purify the cultural elements that are unchristian. Therefore, openness and an attitude that embraces the values of the Bible will promote equality among male and female members of society.

3.4.4. Family Life Apostolate

This study recommends that the Church in Indonesia shall engage in the family life apostolate in a bid to address the suppression of women in Indonesia in particular in the church and religious congregations in Indonesia must develop

⁵² Embu and Woi, 34.

⁵³ John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Jesus Christ and the Peoples of Oceania: (Walking His Way, Telling His Truth, Living His Life) Ecclesia in Oceania* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2001), 16.

⁵⁴ Francis, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013), 239.

⁵⁵ Leonardo N. Mercado, *Working with Indigenous Peoples: A Philippine Resource Book* (Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1994), 71.

special family apostolate ministries or even reinforce the current family apostolate programs.

Miller says that John Paul II, “is convinced that the family, as the first and basic cell of society, has a key role to play in revitalizing social life. It is the first school of the social virtues that are the animating principle of the existence and development of society itself.”⁵⁶ Miller reiterates the position of John Paul II regarding the importance of family saying John Paul II “describes this educational role by pointing out the contribution that the family should make to the society, and the contribution that the society should make to the family.”⁵⁷

He highlighted that “contemporary society is becoming depersonalized. Things, efficiency, and technique are often given more importance than persons. But according to John Paul II, the family can stem this negative tide.”⁵⁸ Thus, it is in this light that this research is convinced that to address the suppressive and discriminative situation of women in general and women in the *TBS*, one has to start from the family which is the basic cell of the society as per the phrase used by John Paul II. The family unit being the foundational block of any society has the potential to shape the kind of society in sight. Miller affirms that “as its life-giving nucleus, the family participates in developing the society. Every social institution, every concern touching education, work, economics, culture, and politics are connected with this vital social cell.”⁵⁹

Family, as stated in the previous chapter, is the first school of values. Miller affirms this proposition saying that “It is in the family that a person first becomes aware of his or her unique dignity and learns what it means to love and to be loved.”⁶⁰ Citing John Paul II, Miller emphasizes that “extent the family promotes true communion among its members, it can serve as ‘the first and irreplaceable school of social life, and example and stimulus for the broader community relationships marked by respect, justice, dialogue, and love’”⁶¹

Miller citing John Paul II says, “Like every living reality, the family too is called upon to develop and grow.”⁶² He emphasizes the pastoral intervention of the Church to the family by saying that it must be emphasized once more that the pastoral intervention of the Church in support of the family is a matter of urgency. Every effort should be made to strengthen and develop pastoral care for the

⁵⁶ J. Michael Miller, ed., *The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortations of John Paul II* (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor Inc, 1989), 129.

⁵⁷ Michael Miller, 129.

⁵⁸ Michael Miller, 129.

⁵⁹ Michael Miller, 129.

⁶⁰ Michael Miller, 130.

⁶¹ Michael Miller, 130.

⁶² Michael Miller, 208.

family, which should be treated as a real matter of priority in the certainty that future evangelization depends largely on the domestic Church.”⁶³

In this section, the researcher is pointing out that the family as a unit is the very crucial and basic cell. It has the potential to change the understanding of suppression and discrimination of women in a family and society. They embrace and upholds the sense of equality between men and their women flock. The researcher would like to turn to the members of the family especially the children who are by now categorized as youth. These are very important power and force that can stand behind such changes. If they are inducted carefully through the Church’s pastoral ministry of the youth. These will be the parents of the family of tomorrow, therefore, the Church in Indonesia and religious congregations must see to it that they are well prepared for marriage life. Thus, such programs must be incorporated into the youth ministry and outreach rather than waiting for them to be engaged before inducting them about marriage.

In this regard, Miller affirms that “more than ever necessary in our time is the preparation of young people for marriage and family life. In some countries, it is still the families themselves that, according to ancient customs, ensure the passing on to young people of the values concerning married life, and they do this through a gradual process of education or initiation.”⁶⁴ This is precisely what rethinking *Toba Batak’s* philosophy is all about and will come into play.

Miller citing John Paul II says, “Marriage preparation has to be seen and put into practice as a gradual and continuous process. It includes three main strategies: remote, proximate, and intermediate preparation.”⁶⁵ He highlights that remote preparation “begins in early childhood, in that wise family training which leads children to discover themselves as being endowed with a rich and complex psychology and with a particular personality with its own strengths and weakness.”⁶⁶ This period is very crucial because this age, children are receptive to the kind of value formation and personality formation they are inducted in. Miller says “It is the period when esteem for all authentic human values is instilled, both in the personal and in social relationships”.⁶⁷ With all that signifies for the formation of character, for the control and right use of one’s inclinations, for the manner of regarding and meeting people of the opposite sex and so on.

From the perspective of the proximate preparation, “this renewed catechesis of young people and others preparing for Christian marriage is absolutely necessary in order that the sacrament may be celebrated and lived with the right moral and spiritual dispositions. The religious formation of young people should

⁶³ Michael Miller, 208.

⁶⁴ Michael Miller, 209.

⁶⁵ Michael Miller, 209.

⁶⁶ Michael Miller, 209.

⁶⁷ Michael Miller, 210.

be integrated, at the right moment and in accordance with the various concrete requirements, with the preparation of life as a couple.”⁶⁸ Finally, the intermediate preparation involves “the celebration of the sacrament of matrimony should take place in the months and weeks immediately preceding the wedding.”⁶⁹

4. Conclusion

The findings that emerged from this study, I conclude four important things based on this research through interviews and also library research as follows, firstly, the need for the reconstruction of the socio-cultural practices of the people of *Toba Batak* society. This research observes that the *TBS* is a patriarchal society. *TBS* shares similar male-centered systems with other patriarchal societies around the world. The common element that is persistent and upheld by all patriarchal societies is the divisive differences defined around the identities of women and men. Having created a society defined by male domination and female subjugation, there is a persistence of binary and asymmetrical division of labor in the society. There are activities that are meant to be performed by a woman and there are activities that are performed by men. It may be said that the *Toba Batak* patriarchal system promotes a binary worldview.

Secondly, this research finds that the individuals, families, and community exist for the sake of the patriarchal social system and the *Toba Batak* culture. Thus, all efforts, struggles, and life development in the *TBS* is to uphold and maintain the social system in spite of its negative impacts on the life of the people. This implies that these social structures and systems that promote asymmetries are more important than the well-being of the subjugated. Culture is another reality that helps drive this binary worldview created by the patriarchal system. It is the cultural practices that legislate the rules and norms that are to be followed and observed by the society and community and even in the nuclear family and the individual’s disposition. This is the scenario that we have in the *TBS*.

Thirdly, this research indicates that there are suppressions and discriminations in the *TBS* favoring the male flock for a very long time. Being conscious of the suppressive situations, there is a call to find means and ways to liberate women from these suppressive burdens. This study discovers that various views about the cause of women’s suppression are held across the globe. This research has discovered the causes of the suppression and discrimination of women in society even today, especially the *Toba Batak* family. This investigation observes from the field research that it is the family structure and system that is a locus where the suppressive and discriminative attitudes are cultivated, nourished, and practiced. Suppressive and discriminative attitudes are practiced in the family. It is in the family that such suppression and discrimination

⁶⁸ Michael Miller, 211.

⁶⁹ Michael Miller, 211.

practices are happening on a daily basis and under one roof by each member of the family. It is also within the family that the children are inducted about discrimination and suppressive attitude and character. Therefore, if we are to advocate for ways to address these suppressions, we must start from the family which is a nursery and then the community which may be regarded a garden whereby non-suppressive and non-discriminative attitudes and characters must develop fully.

Fourthly, this study claims that it is necessary to revisit the philosophy of the TBS as a way forward in addressing the suppressive situation of women in society. Family is a like a field where the seed of positive values of life is cultivated. Children need their parents to set and enforce standards for the right behavior. This is how children learn to assume responsibility for their actions and come to realize that there are consequences for obedience as well as disobedience. Hence the parents must teach their children righteousness, but they must also have instilled discipline in their children.

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