

# Socio- Cultural And Economic Distinctiveness And Transformation Of The Toto Tribe

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*Abstract: The Toto is a primitive, Mongoloid isolated tribal group residing at Dooars area of Alipurduar district in West Bengal. The 'Totopara' (Toto village) has population of 2960 of which 1568 are males while 1392 are females as per Population Census, 2011. Socio- cultural and economic activities such as dwelling place, food and drink, dress, marriage system, language and literature, education, religion of Toto tribes are totally unique and clearly distinguished from the other tribal groups. In comparison with other larger tribes, they are extremely isolated in the hills of the sub-Himalayan region, enveloped by mixed hard wood forest and surrounded by rivers and sandy with gravel. Yet in the recent time the Totos have been changed socio- cultural and economic activities due to influences in the nearby environment. The house pattern of Toto tribes have influenced by the modern technology. They have also influence by the Bengali and Nepalese dresses. The interest for education have been increased among them. So the socio- cultural and economic activities of Toto tribes are in the verge of development.*

*Keywords: Isolated Tribe, socio- cultural and economic backwardness, distinctiveness, transformation, verge of development.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

India is characterized by heterogeneity with their socio-cultural and economic features and its social system. Indian tribal people also contributed the existing socio- cultural and economic diversity. Every tribal group have distinct socio-cultural, economic and political features. In the modern world we are aware that society is never static and socio- cultural, economic and political changes occur spontaneously. The Toto is a primitive old heritage and isolated tribal group residing only a small village called 'Totopara' at Madarihat block in the Alipurduar district of West Bengal. Totopara is located at the foot of the eastern Himalayas near to the south of the border line between Bhutan and West Bengal. Toto's are Mongoloid group of people with small eye and black iris, flat nose, broad and square cheek and thick lips. Their height is medium but body is solid. India Anthropological Survey

recently says that the ever age lifespan of the Toto people is 35 years. They are generally endogamous and marry within their own tribe. They are generally divided the Toto 13 exogamous clans or groups of families from which they choose to marry. They do not marry any one related to them through their paternal uncles or maternal aunts. The Toto Language belongs to Tibeto-Burman family of sub-Himalayan group, as classified by Hodgson and Grierson. They do not have any script. Most of the young members can speak Bengali and Nepali, which are the medium of instruction in the local schools.

## A. STUDY AREA

The area of entire the Toto country called 'Totopara' which is a small village on foothills of eastern Himalayas near Bhutan border. Geographically it is located on 89<sup>0</sup>20' E to

26<sup>0</sup>50' N in the Alipurduar district of West Bengal. It is covered 1996.96 acres or 8.0814 km<sup>2</sup>. The village is about 65 km from Alipurduar town or 22 km from Madarihat police station which is the entrance of the famous Jaldapara wildlife sanctuary. The area is divided into six Gram or Goan (village) namely Panchayatgoan, Mandolgoan, Subhagoan, Mitranagoan, Pujagoan, and Dumdigoan.

## B. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- ✓ To understand the traditional pattern of livelihood of the Toto tribal group.
- ✓ To find out the changing pattern of socio-cultural and economic activities of them.

## C. DATA BASE AND METHODOLOGY

The paper is mainly based on secondary data which has been collected from Community Development Office, Backward Classes Welfare Department, Government of West Bengal, article in journals, innumerable news paper. The primary data has been gathered through pre-designed questionnaires for the target groups of people in the study area. The complied analyze data are interpreted appropriately to find out the distinctiveness and transformation of socio-cultural and economic features of the Toto tribal group.

## II. SOCIO- CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC DISTINCTIVENESS AND TRANSFORMATION

### A. LANGUAGE SPOKEN

According to Hodgson and Grierson's classification the Toto's language belongs to Tibeto-Burman family of sub-Himalayan group. They speak to each other in their own dialect. Such as Noko Ming Hanga? means what is your name? Nati Hapa Ninga ?means how are you ? But very confused, they do not have any letters or script. They read in the Bengali or Nepali medium school.

The life of the Totos is heavily influenced by Nepalese and Bengali. Most of the young people can speak and write Bengali and Nepali. Now they feel to preserved their own language. Dhaniram Toto, a famous poet and writer said there have need to survive their own language. Prof. Amit Chakraborty and Prof. Mahes Pradhan are working regarding this matter. The Himalayan Language Project is working on the first grammatical sketch of Toto language.

### B. DRESS PATTERN

The dresses of the Totos are very simple. They have influenced by the Bengali and Nepalese dresses. Male used pants, shirts and lungis without their traditional dresses Gappo or Gado. Female used shares and salwar camizs without their traditional dress Zuia or Mera etc. They also used silver coin made chains, rings, balas and ears Makri etc.

### C. FOOD HABIT

The Toto's main foods are rice, Chura (parched rice) milk and curd etc. They also eat meat, general goat, pork, poultry and fish of all kinds. Now a day, they habituate with pure Bengali foods rice, carry of vegetables, dal, fish and meat, women eat the same food as men. In each occasion they take a drink called 'Eu', the liquor 'Eu', made from fermented Marka, rice powder and malt which is served warm in Poipa (Wooden glasses).

### D. HOUSE TYPES

The Toto's traditional houses are built of bamboo split wall with bamboo platforms in front of the house called 'Dui'. The houses are made on wooden or bamboo posts about six feet above the ground. All material for house construction come from the surrounding forest, in chiding bamboo, Catechu and rope from the bark of the Odlá tree. The roofs are made with layers of thatched grass. To reach the platform a tree trunk or thick wooden plank is placed diagonally from the ground to the edge of the 'Dui' hence serving as staircase. The home comprises of one room divided into three sections - one for sleeping one for guest-sleeping and the third section for ancestral deities. Guests are not allowed to enter the third section.

The house pattern of the Totos has been influenced by the modern technology. Now a days their houses are not build traditionally like the past. They have been getting many amenities to the government for this purpose. The houses have been building through the government program of LAMPS, ITDP, AMAR BARI etc. Construction materials and types and pattern of the houses of theTotos have changed. Areca nut and forest betel leaf trees are found in every houses.

### E. FESTIVALS

In ancient times they are not very interested for culture programs specially music and dance. They would sing and dance only the occasion of puja or marriage ceremonies but that is rare. Now a days, old people would participate to the singing and dancing. They do competed of poem and song but this scene is rare. Now a days, Hindi, Nepali, Bengali songs are heard in any programme but they do maintain their own culture during festivals.

### F. MARRIAGE SYSTEM

The Toto's families are nuclear type. Joint family is found everywhere. Monogamy is common form of marriage among the Toto but polygamy is not prohibited. It a man dies, he may marry the deceased wife's younger sister but a woman can not marry her deceased husband's brother. On the death of a spouse, the husband or wife must remain single for twelve Months before he or she is free to remarry. There are various ways of acquiring mates, viz

- ✓ Thulbehoea (Marriage by Negotiation)
- ✓ Chor-behoea (Marriage by Escape)
- ✓ Sam behoea (Marriage by Capture)
- ✓ Lamlami (Love Marriage)

The Totos are very conservative and marry within the tribe to preserve their ethnicity. This means marriage take place between cousins too. The result is that many children born from such wedlock become Thalassemia. Research has revealed that the Totos have a high Thalassemia carrier rate of 45%. This has put the tribe in the danger of losing their members to the disease. There is no dowry system. There is no custom of divorce among the Totos. The marriage occasion would battle for three or four days running. During marriage ceremonies they drink 'Eu'. But now they reduced the marriage expenditure. Earlier the wedding ceremony of the Totos was with the duration of three (3) to four (4) days. In recent past the tenure of their marriage ceremony has been reduced to follow the Bengali and Nepali communities. It has also been observed that during those festivals they used to follow of the Bengali and Nepali widely. Not only that they are seen to copy the Bengali and Nepali customs during their wedding festival.

#### G. CHILD CARE

The Totos do name of new born child within 5-9 days priests select the name to Eu on the new born child. They do name in the unequal days after born such as 5,7,9, day etc. They used to birth the child 7 times in a day. As a result the child pass always the through the cold, fever, pneumonia etc. So the infant mortality rate was very high. But they (situation / habits) has changed. Recently they can take care of child. It has been observed that the Totos used to consult with the child specialist doctors to have the better modern medical facilities for their children. They are more conscious about the medical facilities, hygiene matter and health as well as in comparison with their earlier days.

#### H. HEALTH CARE

There is a government health centre. Although they do not use allopathic medicine, due to their location in the sub-Himalayan forests, the Totos have accumulated an intimate knowledge of their environment, including of medical plants for example, for ulcer and headache. They apply the juice of the leaves of Daising (*Cordia dichotoma*) for skin disease they apply the paste of the leaves and fruits of Lutodabai (*Cassia alba* linn) for cold and digestive problems they take the juice of the Makabi (*Drymaria cordata*) or they roast and inhale the fumes of these leaves which cures the paste of the Duba (*Cynodon dactylon*) and for the diarrhea. They take the juice of the root of the Sathimodi (*Emilia sonchifolia*) for stomach pain they take the juice of the bark from the lungdi (*Glochidion assamium*), for eye problems they apply the juice of sathimodi leaf (*Emilia sonchifolia*) and for gum bleeding they apply the juice of the Dirsai leaves (*Kirganelia reticulata*) for simple fever they take the juice of the Pagra roof (*Laportea erenulata*) for small pox they apply the powdered leaves of the Harsco (*Pathos sceridens*) and make the stem of the same plant into a paste to use as a poultice on any fracture, Either they find the medical plants themselves or they take the help of the medicine man in the tribe. They come to hospital but they have faith in exorcise. In their word Dawai pani khanu parchhu, Ghhakri pani Bushunu

parchhu, means take the medicine and should call an exorcist. Medicine for curing the sick people and exorcist for satisfaction of mind. Female Totos are avoiding to produce many child without government amenities. They go to the non-governmental hospital to do permanent sterile and they in traduce themselves as Nepali female. Because the high expenditure of the reading and education of their child the young female theToto brides do not agree to take more than two children.

#### I. EDUCATION AND LITERACY

About 9% of the Totos were literate before 1950, now there are two primary schools and a secondary school in Totopara. The total student in two primary schools are 150, 86 male and 47 female students had been reading in secondary school in 2011-12 session. The interested for education have been increased among them, seven students had been studying in college in 2011-2012 session. Among them two female students was in Coach Bihar College and other students are in Jalpaiguri P.D. College. 6 students was class nine. They read in Aipurduar Macwilliam High School and Collegiate High School. The Total Madhyamik pass person among Toto people was 30 till 2011. This is the very low number in the field of higher education. There are a governmental residential hostel for the primary students with 30 seats. Two government residential hostel for secondary male students and other for female student with total 40 seats.

#### J. RELIGION

The Toto tribes define themselves as Hindus but they have two main Gods whom they worship one is Ishpa who live in the Bhutan hills, they believe it. When he unhappy then they faces sickness. Totos offer him animals and drink 'Eu' to happy him.

Other hand chcima who keeps the village and its people sate from trouble and sicknesses. Totos offer rice fours and 'Eu', to happy her. They have no priests they offer their worships for Ishpa in the open outside the house and cheima inside the house. Attributed to Christian Missionary works, few Totos converts into Christian. They also worship hills, worship Kali Khola, Dangti, Nitingti except of Ishpa and Cheima. They also worship sky, sun, moon etc. Now they participate in Diwalipuja and Durgapuja but in the past they did not worship or participate other communities puja.

#### K. OCCUPATION AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

Due to lack of water and fertile land, crop production is very difficult. Although they cultivate many valuable crops. People live on fish from the river and supplement their diet with root tuber leaves and mushrooms from the forest. There are domesticated animals such as cows, goats, pigs and dogs etc. In more recent time the Totos cleared more of the forest to give space for crop cultivation. Using only organic crowdang and their own indigenous seeds. Recently they cultivate maize, millet, pulses, paddy, potato, sweet potato, tapioca, ginger, green, vegetables, drumstick. Generally tribal's are unable to survive when their stored food runs out. At that time they

work nearby as daily labours. If work is not available that come near to starvation. Government employees are very rare among the Toto community. They carrying orange in the winter season from Bhutan. They also engaged 100 days work under the gram panchayet scheme. There was a time it was unbelievable that Toto people may go out side their country (Totopara) to search for work. They were engaged in carrying edible goods such as salt or rice from plains to Bhutan and jungle products from Bhutan to sell to the people of the plains. They have been moving away from a subsistence economy to market economy. The greatest curse for the Toto's as for others tribes are moneylenders or mahajans. The Totos are very simple, innocent people. They do not understand the value of money. Hence it becomes extremely easy for the mahajans to exploit them. Thus many Totos take loan from the mahajan to meet their daily necessities and then repay the loan letter with areca-nut, bamboo, neaize, millet and other produce, and receive hardly anything for these goods. Hence although it is a type of barter system. It is extremely exploitative.

### III. PROBLEMS OF THE TOTO TRIBES

- ✓ The literacy rate of Totos were 58.05% lower compared to 76.26% of West Bengal (Census, 2011).
- ✓ The state of female literacy is extremely low compared to male literacy was 69.33% while female literacy was 45.45% (Census, 2011).
- ✓ Average Sex Ratio of Totopara is 888 which is lower than West Bengal state average of 950(Census, 2011).
- ✓ Child Sex Ratio for the Toto Para as per census is 835, lower than West Bengal average of 956 (Census, 2011).
- ✓ In Totopara out of total population 47.33% were engaged in work activities (Census, 2011).
- ✓ Male work participation rate is 59.10% while female participation rate is fairly low 40.90% (Census, 2011).
- ✓ They are characterized by socio-economic backwardness.
- ✓ They cultivate at subsistence level with primitive implements.
- ✓ The status of health is extremely poor among them.
- ✓ They suffer from various diseases some which proves to be fatal.
- ✓ They face the problem of social isolation.

### IV. GOVERNMENTAL INITIATIVES FOR THE TOTO TRIBES

- ✓ The state government has appointed the first woman graduate from the Toto tribe as a social worker in the Backward Class Welfare Department, government of West Bengal.
- ✓ The state government has been providing food grains to the Toto.
- ✓ To increase and support to education every Toto child has been made by a number of government and non-government organization (NGOs).
- ✓ To reduce dropout rates, have been providing with government aids and school scholarships.

- ✓ The Totos are also provided with jobs in tea gardens and grameen bank situated in the area.
- ✓ The National Rural Health Mission to address the health needs of unnerved areas. As per the 12<sup>th</sup> plan documents of the planning commission.
- ✓ The Mid-day Meal Programme Supplies free lunches on working days for children in primary and upper primary schools.
- ✓ IC DS center have been providing organized child care services with the objective of providing adequate nutrition to economically disadvantage children to improve the health and nutritional states of children and develop their mental and physical ability.
- ✓ The houses have building through the Government Scheme of LAMPS, ITDP, AMAR BARI etc.

### V. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The Toto tribal group live in social isolation like most other tribes of the state. But in recent years some development in their socio- cultural and economic activities have been observed due to their first hand contact with mainstream population outside of their environment. The status of health and education have been increased among them. Majority of Totos main workers are day labours. Very recent the youth of Toto's are engaged in service and small business like grocery shops or other types of shop. Now they use mobile or telephone. They have got personal land ownership. Electricity reaches to their home. Road has been constructed from their village to town. For the more development of them the following suggestions are given below:

- ✓ To Provide surgeons, medicines, nursing and maternity in the village.
- ✓ To Arrange regular meeting of local heath management and advisory boards.
- ✓ To provide more treatment facilities without any cost to reduce overcome the problems.
- ✓ Conditions of roads and bridge in the rural areas needed to be improved.
- ✓ To utilize properly the government funds and grans for housing.
- ✓ To construct government apartment for rural families.
- ✓ To expand of Indira Abus Yojona.
- ✓ To Ensure use of latrine for al and provisions for strong administrative proceeding for not using Latrine.
- ✓ To Arrange participatory latrine for the land less people.
- ✓ Government may construct latrine for the hardcore poor.
- ✓ To provide supplementary food among children and women.
- ✓ To increase the per capital in come.
- ✓ To enhance the production or income generation capacities of the target groups through the improvement of household food production and creation of alternative employment opportunities.
- ✓ More special attention should be given and developmental planning has been taken through five years planning for Toto tribal groups.
- ✓ To improve the living conditions of Toto's through the provision and strengthening of rural services.

To organized workshop, discussion, seminar, to provides more information among the people.

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