

**Subrata Sarkar**

Research Scholar,
Dept. of Education

West Bengal State University
subratasarkarwbsu@gmail.com

**Prof. Abhijit Kumar Pal**

Professor (H.O.D.),
Department of Education
West Bengal State University

Socio-Cultural and Educational Status of Toto Community in Alipurduar District: An Overview

Subrata Sarkar

Abhijit Kumar Pal

Abstract:

The Toto community, the smallest tribe of West Bengal, lives in Totopara village on the India-Bhutan border in the Madarihat block of Alipurduar district in West Bengal. The Totos were once a forest-based people. They lived by eating meat, forest leaves, fruits. There are 13 clans among the Totos and each clan has its own identity. However, despite the caste division, there is no clan distinction in the Toto community.

Because there is no difference between high and low caste among the Totos. The first opportunity to spread education in Toto Para was a private N.G.O. through Various N.G.O. Apart from financial, cultural and social development, the organization also started focusing on the development of education. Primary, secondary and higher secondary schools have been established in Toto Para with the help of various organizations and the government. Nowadays education reform has come among Totos because Totos are now very conscious about studies and progress in education is seen among them. In this paper, I try to focus on social condition, cultural status and how to develop of Toto Community.

Keywords: *Toto Community, Social condition, Cultural status and educational development.*

1. Introduction:

There are a total of 705 communities in India that are officially recognized as Scheduled Tribes (Biswas, 2019)¹. The Scheduled Tribes are commonly referred to as Adivasis, which literally means aboriginal people in India. Tribals constitute 8.6 percent of India's total population. Among the total Scheduled Tribes of India, there are 38 tribal communities in West Bengal and among the three primitive tribal communities in West Bengal, Toto people and one primitive tribal community are identified (Biswas, 2015)². The Toto tribe lives on the Indo-Bhutan border in the Madarihat block, now part of Alipurduar district. The Toto community is the smallest community in West Bengal. Anthropologically, the Toto tribe is a branch of the Tibetan Mongoloid ethnic group. Toto's physical structure is fit. Their hair is strong and straight. Beards and Mustaches are rare. Distinctive features of the Mongoloid population are present in the

¹ Anil Kumar Biswas (2019), Socio-Economic Profile of Toto Tribe, New Delhi: Aayu Publications, pp-261

² Anil kumar Biswas (2015), Ethnic Identity of Toto Tribe on Crossroad, The Indian Journal of Political Science, V-LXXVI, I- 4, P-848-852.



structure of the nose and the structure of the eyelids. In 1815, Krishnakant Bose's Account of Bhootan first mentioned the Totos. In 1889 Sunder Saheb (Nath, 2022)³ heard from an old Toto that traces of the Toto race could be found in four other places in the Western Doars even before their settlement seven or eight years ago. At one time there were Totgaon of Malbazar Police Station, Totopara of Dhupaguri Police Station, Totpara of Falakata Police Station and Totpara of Alipur Police Station. Later, Dr. Charuchandra Sanyal's "The meches and the Totos two Sub-Himalayan Tribes of North Bengal" wrote about Toto better. At present the residence of the Totos is in Totopara. Belongs to Madarihat Police Station of Alipurduar District. The Tading Hills stand along the India-Bhutan border. The north-west part of the village is surrounded by a mountain wall. Totopara is bounded by the Torsa River in the east and the Howri River in the south-west.

2. Objectives of the study:

- i) To understand the Socio-cultural status of Toto Community.
- ii) To understand the educational status of Toto Community.

3. Review of Literature:

Dhali (1987)⁴ The study described about the Toto community's life style, the evolution of living and acquisition of the land records of the Totos. Majumder (1998)⁵ in his book "The Totos: Cultural and Economic Transformation of a small tribe in The Sub-Himalayan Bengal", described the demographic transformation, social organization, economy and livelihood about the Totos. Roy(2018)⁶ Conducted an Agriculture practice and livelihood status of Toto Community of Alipurduar District in West Bengal. His objectives are to study the distinctive character of the Toto community from their close attachment with nature and to examine their livelihood status based on their socio-economic condition and their agricultural practices. His present study is based on both primary and secondary data. Mandal and Sengupta (2016)⁷ conducted the study about Socio-Economic Status of Tribe: A Case Study of Porobusty, Alipurduar, West Bengal. The study of Poro-busty depicts the real picture of the tribal dwellers' socio-economic condition.

³ Promod Nath (2022), Adim Adibasi Toto, Bankura: Terakota, p- 8.

⁴ Debendranath Dhali (1987), Toto, Kolkata: Cultural Research Institute, p-30-31.

⁵ Bimalendu Majumdar (1998), The Totos: Cultural and Economic Transformation of a small tribe in The Sub-Himalayan Bengal, Academic enterprise.

⁶ Partha Pathim Roy (2018), Agricultural Practices and Livelihood Status of Toto Community of Alipurduar District of North Bengal, West Bengal, RESEARCH REVIEW International Journal of Multidisciplinary, V-3, I-1, p-434-438.

⁷ Jayatra Mandal and Puspita Sen (2016), Socio-Economic Status of Tribe: A Case Study of Porobusty, Alipurduar, West Bengal, Imperial Journal of Interdisciplinary Research, V-2, I-5, p-536-541.



Sanyal (1955)⁸ in his article “On the Totos” published in the Journal of the Asiatic Society, described about the settlement pattern, social and domestic life of the Totos and their language. Sarkar (2015)⁹ The Study to the community of Toto is completely indifferent to education and health because they belong to backward classes of our Society. Sunder (1889)¹⁰ Conduct a study during the British period from 1889 to 1894, he observed the Western Duars. During that time, he wrote seven pages of notes about the various cuisines, language, culture, social status, economic and educational status of the Toto community. Biswas (2019)¹¹ described the social condition and economic condition of Toto Tribe. This study has to analysis the impacts of various socio-economic development schemes on the community. Das (2011)¹² The study measures the socio-economic status of the Toto tribe and suggests suitable remedies. The study also described about the culture, health and their educational background.

Dasgupta and Goswami (2009)¹³ The research is empirical measurement on the socio – economic variables like, age, sex, education, family education status etc. and having importance in maintaining the health status on 320 Toto. Saha et. al., (2019)¹⁴ Study to investigate present scenario of Socio-economic condition of Toto community. Result found that different tribes had different magnitude of Socio-economic status. Paul (2021)¹⁵ Conducted to find out the impact of Ethno-regionalism on educational status among the Toto Tribes. Grierson(1909)¹⁶ described in his “Linguistic survey of India” made the first serious attempt to presented a report on Toto language in the Linguistic Survey of India volume. The material provided in the report was a connected text and a list of words having nouns and verbs. Milligan (1916)¹⁷ A British surverior has described about the Totos, during his survey period 1906-1916. Nath (2017)¹⁸ In the book

⁸ Dr. Charu Chandra Sanyal (1955), The Meches and the Totos, two sub-Himalayan tribes of north Bengal, Journal of the Asiatic Society,

⁹ Sujit Sarkar (2015), The Socio-economic status Education of the Toto Community with special reference to Madarihat Block in the district of Alipurduar in West Bengal, India: Golden Research Thoughts, V-4, I-9, p-1-8.

¹⁰ D. Sunder (1895). Survey and Settlement of Western Duars. Calcutta: Government Press.

¹¹ Anil Kumar Biswas (2019), Socio-Economic Profile of Toto Tribe, New Delhi: Aayu Publications

¹² Jayanta Das (2011), Factors Influencing the Socio-Economic status of Toto tribe in Madarihat Block of Jalpaiguri, West Bengal, Geo-Analyst, 1(2), p- 66-71. https://www.academia.edu/34782769/Factor_influencing_the_socio_economic_status_of_toto_tribe_in_Madarihat_block_of_Jalpaiguri_district_West_Bengal

¹³ Sujit Sarkar (2015), The Socio-economic status Education of the Toto Community with special reference to Madarihat Block in the district of Alipurduar in West Bengal, India: Golden Research Thoughts, V-4, I-9, p-1-8.

¹⁴ Pallab Debnath, Paramita Das and Arup Saha (2019), Present Socio-Economic Scenario of Toto Tribe of Alipurduar, Research Review International Journal of Multidisciplinary, 04(04), p 1205-1210. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348404236_Present_Socio-Economic_Scenario_of_Toto_Tribe_of_Alipurduar

¹⁵ Arup Paul (2021), Impact of Ethno-regionalism on educational status among the Toto Tribes: Issues and Challenges. International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts, 09(01), 2041-2044. <https://ijcrt.org/papers/IJCRT2101249.pdf>

¹⁶ Anil Kumar Biswas (2019), Socio-Economic Profile of Toto Tribe, New Delhi: Aayu Publications, p 11-12.

¹⁷ Anil Kumar Biswas (2019), Socio-Economic Profile of Toto Tribe, New Delhi: Aayu Publications, p 11-12.

¹⁸ Promod Nath (2017), Ekus Shatake To To Somaj-O-Sanskriti, Bankura: Anima Prokashani.

Toto Society and Culture in the 21st Century, Toto highlights the social conditions of communities and their different types of culture. Discusses how they live in social conditions, their various reforms, worship festivals, description of dwellings for their settlements, food habits, Toto music, mantras, routines, education and health. Mitra (1951)¹⁹ Described that the Totos belonging to a very rare race; they live only one village in the wide world, has a spoken language of its own and numbers only about 325. Burman (1955)²⁰ As the Tribal Welfare Officer of Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal in 1955 studied the pattern of relationship between the Toto and the Nepali.

4. Research Methodology:

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

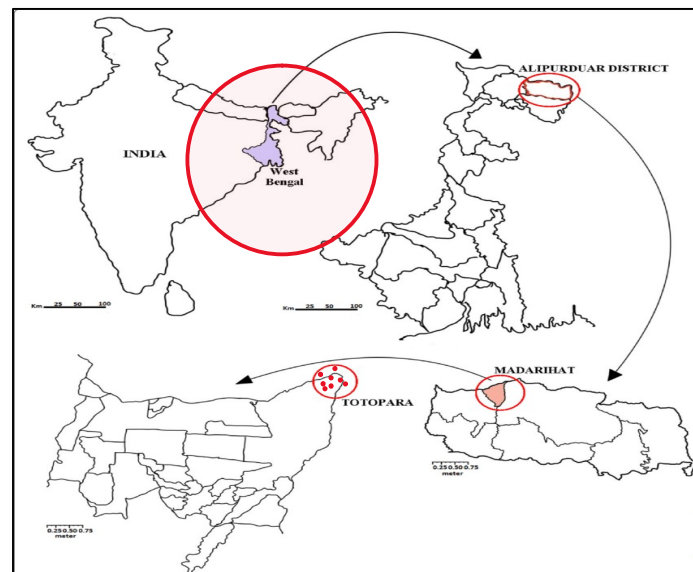


Figure 1: Location of the study

5. Information Reviewed from Field Study:

Following information have been reveals through field study –

5.1. Environment of Toto Community: At present, Totos reside in Toto Para under Madarihat Police Station of Alipurduar District. The Tading Hills stand along the India-Bhutan border. On

¹⁹ Bimalendu Majumdar (1993), Cultural and Economic Transformation of a small Tribe in the Sub-Himalayas: A study of the Totos, Centre for Himalayan studies, p-4. <https://ir.nbu.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/154/14/111102.pdf>

²⁰ Bimalendu Majumdar (1993), Cultural and Economic Transformation of a small Tribe in the Sub-Himalayas: A study of the Totos, Centre for Himalayan studies, p-5. <https://ir.nbu.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/154/14/111102.pdf>



the slopes of this hill is a small hill village called Totopara - whose height ranges from 750 to 1500 feet above sea level and latitude 89°20' east 26°50' north. The north-western part of the village is surrounded by a mountain wall. Totopara is surrounded by the Torsa river in the east and the Howri river in the southwest. The inaccessible forest land on the western side of Howri River - 'Titi' is its name.

5.2 Social Organization of Toto Community:

Five categories are named to govern the Toto society. Their society is organized by the five categories of Kaiji (Priest), Gappu (Mural), Panchayat (Mukhiya), Pow (Ojha) and Nampan. After the Panchayat was elected through elections, the post of Panchayat has disappeared in Toto society. Kaiji determines the day of Toto in which month of the society. In addition, Kaiji conducts marriage chants, worship of the Orangche clan. Gappu took the seat of judge when someone sought judgment from Kaiji regarding land distribution, disputes. When a newborn is born in the Toto society, on odd days Pow goes and chants the name and mantra of the newborn and wears the mangalsutra around the neck. Nampan is needed to gather people for any festival.

5.3 Language:

The people of the Toto community have their own mother tongue. The Totos call their language the 'Yowa' language. Although this language has no script, this language is a complete language. Because this language is a medium of communication between a community and it has its own structure and system. From the genealogical point of view, the original source of the Toto language belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family. Himalayan is a branch of the 'Bhot-Burmese' language group. From this language group many languages of Nepal, North and North East India have emerged. But in 2023, Padma Shri recipient Dhaniram Toto created the language alphabet of the Totos.

5.4 Food Habits:

The rice is boiled or fried in a frying pan and sieved to extract the rice. Later, when corn was cultivated, corn rice was used as a profession. They collect rice, maize, wheat, maroa and cown whenever they are available and use them as food. Besides, they eat more beef, pork and wild vegetables. But nowadays Chishai (bamboo flower) is their favorite food. Totos are used to drinking and tobacco. All the time they have betel nut in their mouth. Besides, drinking alcohol (Eu) is widely practiced in Toto society. Eu's influence in their worship-festivals, social festivals and personal life is immense. They cannot live without drinking Eu.



5.5 Residence of Toto Community:

Totos also have special characteristics in the construction of houses. Na-ke-sha is the name of Totos home. The construction of this residence also has the impression of primitiveness. "They build houses with thatched roofs on bamboo or wooden poles. The houses are 12 to 15 feet long and 8 to 10 feet wide. The floor of the house is usually made of kota bamboo or bamboo kabari at a height of 5-6 feet from the ground. The house is fenced with bamboo fence. There is only one entrance door (*lapung*) to the house. In front of this door is an open balcony 8 feet wide. The balcony is built 8 to 10 inches below the floor of the house" (Biswas, 2019)²¹. A notched tree trunk is used as a ladder to climb up to the balcony. This staircase is called *Kaibu*. A single room in Toto's house. In this room is the seat of the house deity (Chi-ma). This is how they live in bamboo houses.

5.6 Health Condition:

Since ancient times, the people of Toto community used to collect various types of Medicinals from the trees and plants of the forest and treat various diseases like fever, broken bones, diseases, blood vomiting, various types of sores etc. In 1969, the first missionary hospital was opened in Toto neighborhood in collaboration with the Lutheran World Service. Its director was Honorable Hiren Malkhin. Due to the difficulty of travel in remote Totopara, patients with serious diseases had to carry the patient on their shoulders to Madarihat Hospital, 23 km away, or through Lankapara Ramjhora, 15 km through dense forest, to reach Birpara Hospital. Various diseases such as diarrhoea, iodine deficiency, colds, fevers and malaria were seen. Many died during that time especially from TV and whooping cough. Later, in 1993, a government hospital was established in Totopara. Dr. Abhijit Dey joined as the first doctor. After the establishment of the hospital, efforts to live in a new way began in Totopara in the field of medicine. Totora believes that the increase in vaccinations and injections in the pediatric sector has helped curb child mortality.

5.7 Family Planning:

Despite the tribal divisions within the Toto community, there is no clan distinction. Because there is no high or low caste among the Totos. They all love to live together. The number of family members is very small. The population growth rate in the Toto community is very low.

5.8 Professional life:

The Totos were once a forest-dependent people. Animal hunting, gathering wood, wild fruits were their main livelihood. At that time, they were used to Jhum cultivation. But times have

²¹ Anil Kumar Biswas (2019), Socio-Economic Profile of Toto Tribe, New Delhi: Aayu Publications, pp-53.



changed. As a result, most of them are engaged in agriculture in their own land and the majority of the main workers are working in the field as day labourers. However, many are currently involved in government and private sector jobs.

5.9 Religion:

Totos are a nature worshiper. There are no idols in Toto's temple. They worship rivers, trees, mountains and land. Although every family has a household deity, the main God of the Totos is *Ishpa*. This deity is both male and female. His male form is Mahakala and female form is Mahakali. The second major deity of the Totos is *Ishpa's* cousin *Mynanga* or *Pidua*. The Totos have various religious ceremonies throughout the year. The two major religious festivals among the Totos are *Omchu* Puja and *Mayu* Puja. *Omchu* Puja is held for three days in late July or early August every year. Twenty-two days after *Omchu* Puja, *Mayu* Puja continues for five days on *Amavasya* Tithi.

5.10 Culture:

Totos dress like Bhutias. Men wear a cloth 8x2 hands hanging from the neck to the knees. This cloth is called *Undung* by Totos. Another long piece of cloth is worn around the waist much like a belt. Its name is *Goda*. Toto men prepare a pouch-like pouch on the abdomen within this long cloth. In this bag they keep all the snippet items starting from betel nut. Women's clothing is more complicated than men's. They wear a total of four pieces of cloth. A large piece of cloth hangs from the waist to the knees like a lungi called *mera*. Another piece of cloth covers the upper part of the body called *Tomba*. A long piece of cloth worn around the waist like a belt, called a *Bijing*. Girls like men also make a pouch in the waist band to keep betel nuts. A fourth cloth is twisted and tied on the head by girls like a *Turban*. Once upon a time the Totos used to make these cloths with their own hand made yarn. But now more interested in wearing matching clothes bought from the market. Nowadays, *Totora* wears such as pants, shirts and colorful *genji*. Girls also use ready-made blouses, *saiyas*, sarees and *churidars*. Various types of toys used by the Totos were also once made of bamboo.

5.11 Marriage Status:

The Toto society has a peculiar marriage custom. Formerly fiancée marriage was prevalent in Toto society. Although the practice of child marriage is not prevalent in this society, the talk of marriage becomes mature at a very young age. But there is no marriage within the self-caste. Again, *Nubibe* and *Dantrebe* are two different tribes, but they do not intermarry. Because both clans are cousins. There is no bet custom in Toto marriage. Widow marriage is common. Generally, they believe in one marriage system. Although it is customary to marry the sister-in-



law, the elder sister of the wife cannot be married. Two types of marriages are generally seen in Toto society.

5.12 Educational status of Toto Community:

Education was not very important among the Toto community and the government did not give much importance to their education. Private NGO organizations were the first to spread education by teaching Toto. Since 1951, various government and private organizations have come forward to spread the education of Totos. At that time, Bharat Mahajati Mandali set up a welfare center in Toto Para with the help of the government. Along with other developmental works, he also started working in the field of primary education. At that time Yogen Sarkar came to Totopara as welfare organizer. After the death of Zubin Sarkar in 1956, Dil Bahadur Rana was appointed as the Government Welfare Organiser. Later, Santosh Bhattacharya joined the work of Gharma Prasad Sharma Toto Para in January 1964 and 15 July 1965 as a teacher-cum-welfare organizer. Both of them are aware of their work and arrange regular teaching of Toto and Nepali students through Bengali medium. According to Sontosh Bhattacharjee “perhaps there is no other tribal community in India which is as backward as the Totos in matters of education. So far only 15 to 16 persons have learnt to put in their signature during the past 20 or 21 years since educational efforts were initiated way back in 1952” (Majumdar, 2013)²².

In 1969-70, John Ekka was replaced by a teacher named Anugha Ekka. He teaches students in both Bengali and English. The mission authority provides the daily meals along with the teaching of the students in the school. As the number of students increases, so does the interest in education. Dr. Charuchandra Sanyal has written “A big school-house has been built when Anugha Ekka an Oran Lady was the Teacher and fifty-five boys and girls were enrolled. I saw many of the Totos who could speak; in Bengali Language” (Nath, 2022)²³. In 1972 this primary school was officially recognized by the District Vidyalyaya Board. After that, this school was approved for class VIII in 1976 and class X in 1979 in Totopara. The name of this school is Dhanpati Toto Memorial High School. After the approval of Dhanpati Toto Memorial High School in Totopara in 1979, some Toto students took the Madhyamik examination in the same year and Chittaranjan Toto was the first to pass Madhyamik that year. Sanjeev Toto was the first to graduate in 1998. In 2016, Dhananjay Toto was one of the first Totos to obtain a master's degree. Among women, Rita Toto was the first to graduate in 2001 and Sanchita Toto was the first to graduate with honors in 2003. At present, the number of graduates and post graduates in Totopara is also

²² Bimalendu Majumdar (2013), A Sociological study of the Toto Folk Tales, Kolkata: The Asiatic Society, pp-78.

²³ Promod Nath (2022), Adim Adibasi Toto, Bankura: Terakota, pp-41.



increasing. Many of them have joined government and private jobs. At present, some English medium private schools have also been established in Totopara.

6. Findings:

- i) People of Toto community are not at all aware about education and health. Because they are a backward class of our society. They have no knowledge of the benefits of education. Government has to take various steps for the promotion of Totos.
- ii) Most of the Totos work as labourers. As a result of this, their financial hardship continues. Totoro will benefit if the government takes various steps for this.
- iii) Due to various superstitions among the Totos, they lag behind the present society. They should be made aware through education.
- iv) There is a practice of early marriage in the Toto community and the prevalence of thalassemia is high among them due to the prevalence of intermarriage.
- v) Literacy rate of Totos is very low compared to central and state literacy rate.
- vi) Totoras are denied the benefits of government schemes. For them, the government will play a strong role so that they get the services of the projects.
- vii) Their housing, food habits and lifestyle are not developed.
- viii) The Totos do agriculture according to primitive methods. They are unable to produce crops properly as they are not aware of the new techniques of agriculture. Therefore, the government will provide various programs to improve the Totos in agriculture and introduce them to various techniques.

7. Suggestions:

- i) Govt will help small businesses by providing loans to Totos.
- ii) Totos need to improve the health center and appoint better quality doctors.
- iii) Sometimes campaigning for health conscious should be done.
- iv) Roads should be constructed in Totopara and communication with nearby cities should be improved.
- v) Literacy rate should be improved by eradicating illiteracy.
- vi) Drinking water tap should be provided.
- vii) Students should be school oriented.
- viii) Totos need to increase their ability to use technology.

8. Conclusion:

Toto tribe is one of the 38 tribes of West Bengal. Totos are most primitive community of West Bengal. They live on the Indo-Bhutan border in Madarihath block of Alipurduar district in West



Bengal. Their communication system is very bad. Their social and cultural condition is slowly improving. They are very backward in terms of education. But slowly the Toto communities are coming into the field of education. The government has to play a more exemplary role to improve them. Especially education should be developed. Education can make them aware. If they are aware, they will be able to live well in this society in harmony with everyone.

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