

# **Study on Socio-Economic Status and Transformed Ethnicity of the Toto Tribe in WB**

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## **Abstract**

The primitive, ethnic, and remote "Toto Tribe" resides only in the Alipurduar District of West Bengal within a small hamlet named "Totopara", surrounded by river and forest. Totos basically relied on their archaic culture and way of life and were hesitant to accept any kind of social deviation in the context of modern socio-economic development. But, in the recent past, a radical change has been observed among Totos, particularly among youths, in the question of socio-cultural and economic advancement. The impact of globalization has also intensely penetrated the tribal ethnicity of Totos. The undertaken study is an honest endeavor to explore the impact of socio-economic-cultural changes in the surroundings on Toto hallmark culture, lifestyle, and tribal ethnicity and to examine their present socio-economic status in the light of the transformed socio-economic-cultural environment in Totopara. The objectives of the study have been attained on the basis of both primary and secondary data collected from various sources, including literature survey analysis and empirical analysis of field survey data. The collected data was duly compiled, analyzed, and interpreted using standard statistical techniques with the help of computer software. The study shows that the majority of non-Toto residents of Totopara and its environs have had a significant negative impact on and undermined the Toto trademark culture, lifestyle, and tribal ethnicity in the altered globalized environment. On the other hand, the socio-economic condition of Totos is not at all satisfactory, even in modern days. Most of the Toto

people are still engaged in agricultural activities as their livelihood. The agricultural lands of the Totos within Totopara are being forcibly encroached upon by the neighboring non-Toto people, especially Nepali people, which results in crucial livelihood crises as well as existence crises for the Totos even in their homeland.

### **Introduction**

The 'Toto tribe' is a primitive, ethnic, and isolated tribe found in the small village of 'Totopara' in the Alipurduar district of West Bengal (WB), India. Totos' homeland, Totopara, is situated just inside the WB-Bhutan international boundary (IB), on the western bank of the River Torsa, at the base of the eastern Himalayas, under the Madarihat Block of Alipurduar district in WB. Nestled in the slopes of the sub-Himalayan area, Totopara is a remote place encircled by rivers and thick forests. Prior to 1865, Totopara area was under the control of Bhutan. Toto tribes define themselves as Hindus who have two main Gods, *viz.* Ishpa and Chiema, apart from the Vedic Gods (Barman&Gupta 2022). Totos very often offer animal and drinking liquor "Eu" to please their gods. The Totos, who belong to the Indo-Bhutanese tribal community, are a Mongloid race characterised by a flat nose, broad and square cheekbones, thick lips, small eyes, and a black iris. They have a somewhat darker complexion, which reflects their proximity to the equator (Egiye Bangla e-Bangla 2022). Totos are extremely isolated tribal groups that live in the hills of the sub-Himalayan region, encircled by rivers and enshrouded in thick forests. An animist, homogenous tribal community with a distinct territory, culture, and language, they are known for their straightforward economies and polities (De&Datta 2014).

Totos were supposed to be prevailing from Teesta to Sankosh-Gadadhar Rivers at a time. Due to several causes, the community gradually abolished outside Totopara; those reasons might be malaria, black fever, and other epidemics, demographic shifts, changes in nature-human interactions, alleged oppression of Bhutanese superordinates, and external influences. They might have been absorbed by other communities like the Mech (Bodo group). Mech (Bodo) people are found sporadically in the entire Dooars region with a higher concentration in Assam Dooars (Bodoland Autonomous Territory). Mech people also exist in Ballalguri and Madarihat.

Totos might have fractionally moved back into Bhutan Himalayas and Sikkim as well as in Nepal and intermingled with locals like Doya, Lepcha, Garo, and Dhimal (Dasgupta 2013: *Torsa River and Ontology of Toto Primitive Tribal Group: Line of Optimism*). They had a cultural

difference with the Doya community, a tribe of Bhutan, in terms of their food habits, clothes, deities, etc., and the Toto community shifted to the Totopara after a conflict with the Doya community (Jamal, Upadhyay & Dua 2021). Probably due to the remoteness of Totopara, Totos could survive lonely and could somehow maintain their ethnic identity. Traditionally, Toto people lived in the elevated bamboo huts (Debnath, Das & Saha 2019). They have their own distinct hallmark cultural heritage, rituals, and tribal ethnicity. Anthropologists concur that the Toto language and culture are completely distinct from those of the surrounding Rajbongshis, Koch, Mech, or Bhutanese Sharchop tribes. Their racial heritage is connected with their remoteness and traditional livelihood patterns.

The language Totos speak nowadays has so many outer influences due to their outer exposures. However, according to tradition, Toto is related to sub-Himalayan ethnic groups through the Tibeto Himalaya Branch of the Tibeto-Burman subfamily of the Tibeto-Chinese family (Dasgupta 2013 :Torsa River and Ontology of Toto Primitive Tribal Group: Line of Optimism). In earlier days, Totos were Jhum cultivators, hunters, copper collectors (Majumdar 1991).

Totos typically marry within their own tribe and practice endogamy. They are generally split up into thirteen exogamous clans of families, from which they can choose their spouses. Among those thirteen, five strong clans are: Dankobei, Dantrobei, Budubei, Boudubei, and Bangabei, which represent the majority of the families.; and others of Dhiringchankobei, Nurinchankobei, Mantrochei, Manchinchei, Nubebei, Rekanjibe, Nischankobei, Digbei, Badanga, Lengajibe and Jantrobei are communities of people (Das 2021).

Traditionally, Totos were very conservative and got married within the tribe to preserve their ethnicity. As marriages took place between cousins too, this resulted in, many children born from such wedlock became thalassemic (Barman & Gupta 2022). Research revealed that the Totos had a high thalassemia carrier rate of 45%. This had put the tribe in the danger of losing their members to the disease. The only other option was to marry outside the tribe. But the members were opposed to the idea since their ethnicity would be at stake if they got married with the people from other communities (Majumdar 1991). The majority of Toto inhabitants lack literacy; although spread of education has been found among younger Toto generation. Furthermore, they have been suffering from various health issues; although setting up a Health Centre by the Govt. in Totopara has benefited them as regards their health recovery.

## Study on Socio-Economic Status and Transformed Ethnicity of the Toto Tribe in WB

The name of the Toto tribe was not included in the list of scheduled tribes (ST) in the first 'Constitution Order, 1950'. They came to be considered by the Union Govt. as a scheduled tribe community for the first time on 29th October 1956. In the year 1975, Govt. of India, by an official announcement, declared them as the Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) which was renamed as the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in the year 2006. PVTGs have some common features such as: homogeneity, numerical inferiority, isolated social structures made of simple materials, orality, basic technology, slow-changing, etc.

Totos were at the serious risk of extinction during the past few decades. In Totopara, there were just 321 Toto people residing in 69 distinct dwellings as per the 1951 census. The population of Toto rose to 922 people in 1991, living in 180 different homes. In the 2001 census, their number had increased to 1,157, and in the 2011 census, their number had further increased to 1,387 - all living in Totopara (Sengupta2015). During recent past, various protective measures such as building of dwelling house, food and drinking water facilities, health support etc. taken by the Govt. to protect this sub-Himalayan tribe from extinction. As consequence, the total number of Toto population has been gradually increasing over the last few years.

In the past, Totos were reluctant to embrace any kind of social change in the context of the modern, techno-centric economic development. Instead, they were satisfied to stick to their long-standing customs, socio-cultural practices, and traditional way of life. However, there has been a noticeable shift in the Toto tribal group recently, especially with regard to the younger generation's views on modern, techno centric economic development. The distinctive characteristics of their culture and ethnicity have also been profoundly impacted by globalization.

The community were formerly nomadic and dependent on it for their existence. However, they have been compelled to abandon their traditional cultural heritage, way of life, and means of survival due to the effects of the worldwide socio-economic transformation. The younger generation of Toto tribe members has experienced a shift in their engagement in more contemporary forms of economic activities. The traditional ways of living and methods of support in the community have gradually changed to suit the new era of employment chances and lifestyles that primarily rely on technology and present a multitude of opportunities (Ghosh&Saha 2017). Thus, Totos are caught between their hallmark tradition and ethnicity on one hand; and modernization and techno-centric advancement on the other.

On the other hand, during the recent past, it has been observed that the non-Toto community like Nepali, Bengali Rajbanshi, Bihari, etc. with a considerable population have started to reside in Totopara making Toto people numerical minority in their homeland. This has remarkably changed the socio-economic environment in Totopara. Totos have become a minority in Totopara which results in a huge impact on their language, dress, food habit, culture, and their tribal ethnicity as a whole. Nowadays, the community has been compelled to coexist with a larger number of non-Toto communities in their native land. As a consequence, maintaining Toto's hallmark culture, dress, language, rituals and the Toto tribal ethnicity as a whole have been standing in front of a crucial challenge. As a combined effect of the crucial issues discussed above, it seems that the Toto community has been struggling to maintain their hallmark tribal culture and ethnicity even in their motherland.

### **Background of the Study**

The Toto tribal group was first described in 1815 by Krishna Kanta Basu, a British government official working in Ranagapur. Following that, D. Sendars, a settlement officer in Jalpaiguri, provided an extensive seven-page report on them. Later, Charu Chandra Sanyal gave a public description of the Totos (Sarkar 2015). In the 1950s, Totos were on the verge of extinction, but recent efforts to protect their communities from being overrun by outsiders have managed to both conserve their distinctive traditions and increase the number. As per the 1951 census, the total population of Totos in Totopara village was only 314; whereas, as per the 2011 census, their number in their hamlet had increased to 1,387.

After reviewing existing literatures on the Toto community, it becomes evident that their socio-cultural and economic activities, including their dwelling, house pattern, food and drink, clothing, living pattern, marriage system, language, literature, education, religion, and profession, are completely distinct from those of other tribal groups. In recent times, their socio-cultural and economic activities have been challenged due to influences of rapidly changing nearby environment. The Totopara tribes were dependent on their prehistoric means of subsistence, but social changes have forced them to stray from their own traditional ways of life. Modern technology development has had an influence on the Toto tribes' dwelling design. Traditionally they lived in small bamboo huts. These huts had straw thatches and were built on

tall *machasor* elevated platforms. To enter the hut, a single log is put in; at night, the log is taken down (Debnath, Das&Saha 2019).

However, these ancient Toto dwellings are no longer common in Totopara since contemporary pucca and kachcha homes have taken their place. The clothing of the Bengali and Nepalese neighbours has had a big influence on them. Even if a sizable portion of Totos remain illiterate, the younger generation now has a greater interest in learning. The working-age population of the Totopara village has been steadily changing as a result of their involvement in increasingly modern forms of economic activity. The traditional way of life in the community is evolving to conform to the contemporary, technologically-driven era, where a plethora of options are available without regard for environmental sustainability or resource consumption.

Therefore, Totos' socio-cultural and economic activities are about to gradually develop, but there is still an ideological struggle going on in Toto tribal society between the influence of these developments and their traditional tribal identity. Their tribal ethnicity has therefore already undergone substantial transformation. As of right now, the Toto tribal community's members freely accept and engage with outsiders. As a result, Totopara is now a destination for ethno-tourism, with more visitors from the outside world (De&Datta 2014). This has certainly changed their social fabric. The new impositions have already altered their culture, way of life, livelihoods, and participation in the workforce. The unspoiled lands of Totopara are now accessible by the open roads of modern civilization. The study of the patterns of change in the community's life and surroundings has therefore become very necessary. This is closely linked with the paucity of literature which the section below amplifies.

### **Review of Existing Literature**

A good number of studies have so far been conducted on Toto Tribe covering their socio-economic status and other areas of their survival. A recent study on socio-economic condition of Toto Tribe in WB, distinctly identified that most Toto families lived below the poverty line as a result of their extremely low income, high illiteracy rate, and extremely backward socioeconomic standing (Das, J 2011). To transmit their socioeconomic progress, they required a comprehensive set of development policies. Toto Primitive Tribe in Conserving Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary), in another study on contribution of Toto Tribe to protect the nature, closely witnessed that Toto's way of life was built on nature, and they truly tried to live in harmony with it rather than harming

it. The uniqueness of the Totos in Totopara had been successfully maintained. They exhibited excellent self-control and resilience. As a result, Totos were actually defending the environment (Dasgupta, A 2013).

In their study on multidimensional poverty index on Toto Tribe in WB, S.De & K. Datta observed that the multi-dimensional poverty index (MPI), which was adjusted for the severity of the deprivation experienced, showed the proportion of the population that was multi-dimensionally poor. It made up 57% of the population of the Toto Tribe in WB, which was significantly higher than the country's average and about similar to Ethiopia. For remedy, they opined that the severe poverty issue in Totos can only be resolved by Govt. measures and education.

Studying the *“Impact of Globalization on Tribal World of West Bengal”*, yet another study depicted how far the pattern and quality of living of socially disadvantaged people (the tribal people) including Toto tribal community had changed through globalization in West Bengal. The quality of life meant the wellbeing of any society or individual. It also included physical, socio, and cultural sphere of life of the Toto people of West Bengal (Ghosh, P 2015), (Ghosh, D & Saha, S 2017), the study titled *“Transformations of traditional livelihood and Economic composition of population: A case study of Totopara Village (West Bengal)”* was based on empirical analysis of transformation of traditional livelihoods and economic condition of the Toto tribal community. Crux area of the study focused on the transformation took place in the occupational and employment pattern of the Toto community due to impact of globalization.

P.P Roy (2018) in his study on agricultural practices and livelihood status of Toto community in W.B, strongly noticed that the Toto community was still fundamentally based on agriculture. The majority of Totos lacked a formal education, and the younger generation frequently skipped classes. It was strongly advised that the government should take swift, severe measures to safeguard their authenticity.

(Debnath, P. Das, P. & Saha, A 2019), in their study on socio-economic scenario of Toto Tribe in WB, significantly perceived that, in terms of social, cultural, economic, and personal dimensions, Totos were relatively underdeveloped. The primary issue with the primitives was that they were disappearing because of a shortage of population, but now they were steadily growing in number. They were still largely illiterate. Despite the government's efforts to lessen the issue, the majority of the region was still underdeveloped. In addition, social awareness and

## Study on Socio-Economic Status and Transformed Ethnicity of the Toto Tribe in WB

the support of numerous non-governmental organisations were essential for minimising issues and the overall development of Totos.

Jamal Upadhyay, A R Dua (2021), in their study on changing socio-cultural behaviour of Toto Tribe in WB, strongly recommended that all relevant authorities, including the state government, district administration, and local authorities, must act immediately to ameliorate Toto's living circumstances. If not, they will eventually become extinct entirely, and we will lose one of the most significant living cultural legacies of the country. At the very least for the sake of human civilization, Totos must be conserved.

A.Das (2021), in his study on Toto society and culture after colonial period, witnessed that the population of Totos was steadily declining as a result of numerous diseases. This tribe had relatively limited access to educational opportunities, and Totopara had very little communication resources. Despite Toto's close-knit social network, it was now considered taboo to marry a boy or girl from a different caste or under the influence of a mixed culture. N. Barman & N.S Gupta (2022), in their work on impact of globalization on Toto Tribe, crucially observed that the Toto tribe had been transitioning from a subsistence economy to a commercial one as a result of globalization. Additionally, the hamlet had recently seen changes from communal land ownership to individual land holdings and from a remote tribe to a multiethnic environment.

### **Research Gap**

Numerous research studies have been conducted on the Toto Tribe in West Bengal, as mentioned in the above series of literature reviews. The majority of these studies have been based on empirical research on the socio-economic conditions of the Totos, rather than on the socio-economic situation based on their transformed tribal ethnicity as a result of the fast-modernizing outer world's influence. The current study has been conducted in order to address the overlapping limitations that were found in the studies listed within the literature review. Based on the Toto tribal community's altered tribal ethnicity as a result of the modernized effect of the outside world, the current study is an honest attempt to analyze the socioeconomic and cultural reality of the community today in WB. The goal of the current study is to identify the areas that need to be prioritized for the Toto tribe community's overall progress. The study's recommendations for the general growth, continuation, and preservation of the tribal ethnicity of



the endangered Toto people in WB are anticipated to be implemented by the government and other relevant authorities.

### **Aims / Objectives of the Study**

The undertaken study is comprehensively conducted with the following objectives:

- (i) To study and assess impact of socio-economic influence of the outer world on the culture, dresses, language, rituals, livelihood and tribal ethnicity as a whole of the Toto Tribal community.
- (ii) To study and assess relationship between the Toto and Non-toto people in Totopara and to identify major areas of conflict between them.
- (iii) To study, assess and analyze the extent of transformation of Toto tribal ethnicity already took place to cope up with the fast-changing socio-economic environment in the surrounding modernized world.
- (iv) To study, assess and analyze present socio-economic status of the Toto Tribe in the light of their transformed tribal ethnicity.

### **Location of the Study Area**

The entire study area falls in Toto Tribal village, called 'Totopara' (J.L. No. 33). Geographically it is located on 89020' E to 26050' N in the Madarihat Block of Alipurduar District of West Bengal. It covers total 1996.96 acres or 8.0814 sq. kms area. Totopara is a cluster of three small hillocks, which are situated 750 to 1,250 feet above sea level at the foot of the eastern Himalayas. It is an elongated and stretching from North to South, covering a length of about 4 km. Totopara village is surrounded by the Bhutan foothills to the north, Torsa River to the east, Lankapara Tea Estate on the northwest and Titi and Hauri tributaries and the Titi reserve forest to southwest as natural boundary.

The village Totopara is about 65 kms from Alipurduar Town (District Head Quarter of Alipurduar District), 23 kms from Madarihat police station and near to the famous Jaldapara Wildlife National Park. Totopara mouza is divided into six Gram or Goan (*i.e.* village) namely, Panchayat goan, Mandol goan, Subha goan, Mitranggoan, Puja goan, and Dhumchigoan. A single lane crossing Titi and Hauri tributaries twice connects the village with the National Highway 31 through Hantapara. An alternative jungle path through Titi reserve forest is also there along the

## Study on Socio-Economic Status and Transformed Ethnicity of the Toto Tribe in WB

west bank of Torsa River. At the east bank of this river, Hasimara-Jaiga on roadways route to Bhutan is located. Totopara is located at the furthest northern corner of the state of West Bengal. Totopara as a place is not easily accessible to outsiders due to lack of direct road communication from the nearest Railway station at Hasimara situated at a distance of 17 km. Even in modern days, Totopara can be reached after crossing “seven oceans and thirteen rivers” in true sense. The map of the undertaken study area, Totopara village, along with its surrounding areas is shown under Figure 1 below:

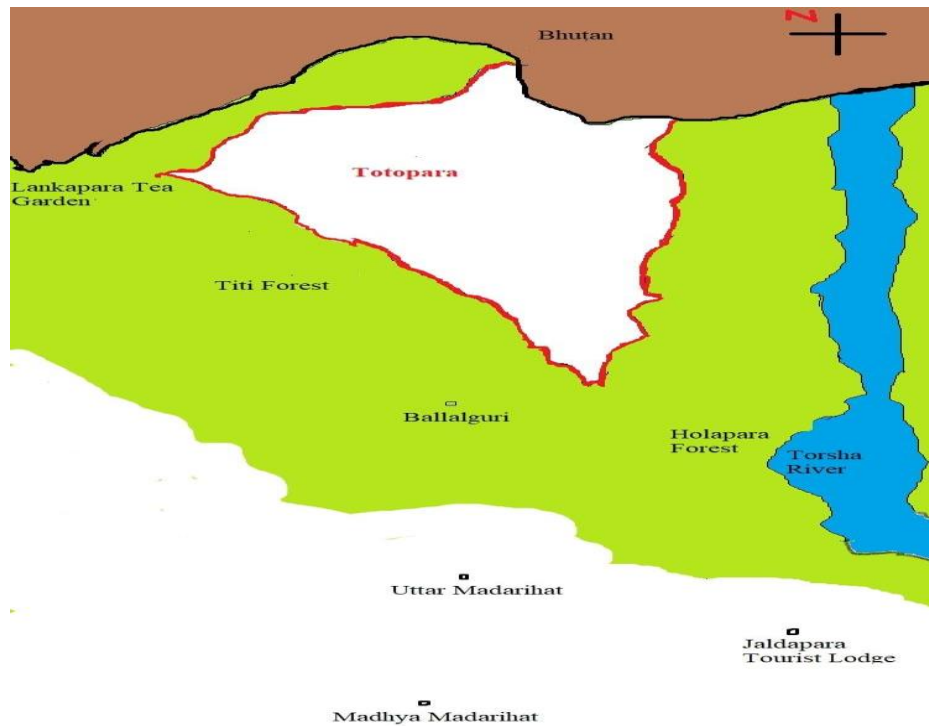


Fig. 1: Map of Totopara and its surroundings

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## Methodology and Materials

### **Methodology**

The basic frame of the study is constructed on the basis of intensive literature survey and extensive field survey on stratified random sampling basis. The objectives of the undertaken study have been attained on basis of both primary and secondary data collected from various sources including literature survey analysis and empirical analysis of field survey data. The data used for empirical analysis are collected from field survey in form of personal interaction, interviews, group discussion and answers to the well-designed questionnaires with ethnographic intervention. Literature survey data have been collected from Community Development Office, Backward Classes Welfare Department, Govt. of West Bengal, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Govt. of India, Anthropological Survey of India, Libraries having tribal resources, other Govt. reports, reports of the concerned NGOs, reports of the previous researchers, reports of electronic and print media, published articles in journals etc.

Both quantitative and qualitative data are collected during the field survey. The quantitative data have been collected through questionnaire survey. Both closed and open-ended questions are set out for the survey purpose following stratified simple random sampling technique. Qualitative information collected through personal interaction, group discussion and interviews have been recorded by keeping a diary on Laptop and taking essential notes on it during the field survey.

Collected data have been compiled, analyzed and interpreted by using standard statistical techniques with the help of computer software and are represented by various cartographic techniques. Compiled analysis of data have been interpreted appropriately to find out the specified areas of objectives.

### **Field Survey and Sample Selection**

I conducted my field survey for the purpose in two phases, one in April, 2019 and the other in April, 2022 respectively and extensively surveyed Totopara village and interacted with a large number of common Toto tribal people, their community chiefs, leaders of Toto Kalyan Samity, teachers and students of schools in Totopara, students of Computer Training Centre at Totopara, a good number of Non-Toto people residing in Totopara, concerned public representatives,

## Study on Socio-Economic Status and Transformed Ethnicity of the Toto Tribe in WB

concerned Govt. officials, local Panchayet members etc. Said survey had been conducted with all ages and genders of Toto and Non-Toto people residing in Totopara.

During said two phases of field survey, total one hundred and sixty six (166) Toto tribal people of different ages and gender in Totopara were interacted with, categorical details of them are given below under Table – 1 :

**Table – 1: Classification of Toto Tribal People interacted with in Totopara during both phases of field survey:**

<i>Age group of interacted persons</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Above 75 years	01	00	01
Above 60 to 75 years	05	01	06
Above 45 to 60 years	20	07	27
Above 30 to 45 years	30	12	42
Above 20 to 30 years	35	17	52
14 to 20 years	24	14	38
<b>Total</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>166</b>

During said two phases of field survey, total seventy-five (75) Non-Toto people in Totopara of different community, religion and gender were interacted with, categorical details of them are given below under Table – 2:

**Table – 2: Classification of Non-Toto People interacted with in Totopara during both phases of field survey:**

<i>Community</i>	<i>Religion</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Nepali	Hindu	40	10	50
Nepali	Buddhist	04	00	04
Rajbanshi Bengali	Hindu	09	03	12
Muslim Bengali	Islam	02	00	02
Bihari	Hindu	05	02	07
<b>Total</b>		<b>60</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>75</b>

### **Reliability of the Data Set used for Opinion Survey**

Cronbach's '*alpha coefficient*' confirms the internal consistency of the set of items of a given scale. The present data set (*i.e.* questions in both the questionnaire) for the opinion study shows that Cronbach's *Alpha* is 0.8989. In general, any value greater than 0.50 is desirable for the Cronbach's *Alpha*. Accordingly, my data set (*i.e.* questions in both the questionnaire) is tested for the opinion study as it is having quite desirable Cronbach's *Alpha*.

### **Data Collection, Analysis and Interpretation Procedure**

For the purpose of collection of field survey data, I meticulously designed an exhaustive well-structured questionnaire containing twenty-six (26) questions to gather required information from the people of Toto tribal community. On the other hand, I meticulously designed an exhaustive well-structured questionnaire containing fourteen (14) questions to gather required information from the people of Non-Toto community residing in Totopara.

Primary data collected from both phases of field survey through personal interaction, group discussion and questionnaire survey had subsequently been systematically arranged, compiled and analyzed by using standard statistical techniques with the help of Minitab computer software and were represented by various cartographic techniques and finally rationally interpreted for achieving aims / objectives of the undertaken study.

Responses to each set of questionnaires received from respondents were separately summarized in number and percentage format. Responses received against each individual question mentioned in both sets of questionnaires had been analyzed to validate whether those were statistically significant or not. One-sample Proportion Test (for Yes / No type of questions) and One-sample Chi Square Test (for more than two-point scaled questions) at 5% significance level had been examined through Minitab 21 Software to test validity of the hypothesis of each individual question mentioned in each set of questionnaires.

### **Discussion**

The basic frame of the study is based on intensive literature survey on Totos and extensive field survey in Totopara on stratified random sampling basis. The objectives of the study have been attained on structured analysis of both primary and secondary data collected from field survey and literature survey respectively.

## Study on Socio-Economic Status and Transformed Ethnicity of the Toto Tribe in WB

Crux of the undertaken study has been discussed in a focused manner as below:

Literature survey data had been collected from Community Development Office, Backward Classes Welfare Department, Govt. of WB, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Govt. of India, Anthropological Survey of India, Libraries having tribal resources, other Govt. reports, reports of the concerned NGOs, reports of the previous researchers, reports of electronic and print media, published articles in journals etc.

The data used for empirical analysis were collected from extensive field survey in form of personal interaction, interviews, group discussion and answers to the well-designed questionnaires with ethnographic intervention.

Both Toto and Non-Toto people in Totopara of different ages, social status, financial status, educational background, and employment had been interacted with.

While interacting with Toto and Non-Toto people in Totopara, focus of interrogation had been given on the following prime issues:

- (a) Present livelihood options for Totos;
- (b) Present socio-economic status of Totos;
- (c) Present demographical status in Totopara;
- (d) Present social condition in Totopara;
- (e) Influence of Non-toto culture, dress, language, food habit, life style etc. on Totos;
- (f) Extent of transformed Toto tribal ethnicity to cope up with the modern globalized environment.
- (g) Extent of Toto tribal culture, language and ethnicity remain intact.
- (h) Impact of influence of rapidly modernized surrounding world on Toto life.
- (i) Relationship between the Toto and Non-toto people in Totopara;
- (j) Identification of major areas of conflict between Toto and Non-toto people.

## Results

### **Regarding Toto tribal ethnicity, its transformation and conflicts between tribal ethnicity and impact of influence of rapidly modernized surrounding world**

Analyzing data collected from the literature survey and field data survey, following findings have been observed as regards to Toto tribal ethnicity, its transformation and conflicts between tribal ethnicity and impact of globalized surrounding world on Totosin Totopara village:

Although, as per record shown in the 2011 census, Toto population was 1,387, but, as per information provided by Mr. Ashok Toto, the President of Toto Kalyan Samity, and Mr. Bokul Toto, the Secretary of Toto Kalyan Samity, total number of Toto tribal people presently residing in Totopara is 1,632; whereas total non-toto people residing in the homeland of Totos is more than 3,000 as on March, 2022. Numerical minority of Toto tribal people even in their native village has brought them into a stage of crucial ethnic, cultural, socio-economical and even existence crisis. Presence of majority Non-Toto people in Totopara with their dominant culture and life style has remarkably influenced on the culture, ethnicity, dress, language as well as overall existence of the Toto tribal community. Although Toto culture and ethnicity are maintained by the Toto people in their personal life when they are at home, but they cannot maintain their ethnic culture in the social life at Totopara due to dominance of Non-Toto culture and life style.

Entire Toto tribal community can speak in their Toto mother language, but major portion of the Toto tribal community cannot read and write their own language. Although Toto people speak in Toto language in their personal life, but they can hardly speak in their mother tongue in Totopara when they are out of your home. In social life at Totopara, Totos have been compelled to be accustomed with other languages like Bengali, Nepali and Hindi. There was no script of Toto ethnic language till recent past. Scripts of Toto language has recently been invented by Mr. Dhuniram Toto, a local resident from Toto community who was awarded with Padmashree in 2022 by the Govt. of India, with the help of Mr. Tobi Anderson, an Australian well-wisher. A privately managed school, namely Chittaranjan Toto Memorial Education Centre, is set up in Totopara by the own initiative of Toto people where students are taught up to Class 8 standard and the Toto ethnic language is optionally taught up to Class 4 standard. Chittaranjan Toto was the first among Toto community who passed Madhyamik Examination. Presently, total 94

students are studying in Chittaranjan Toto Memorial Education Centre, of which 70% are from the Toto tribal community and the remaining from the Non-Toto neighbouring families.

Totos are religious and by faith Hindu having two main Gods, viz. Ishpa and Chiema. Toto tribal people still observe their ethnic Manka festival in every year in the month of September. Totos have even been induced to abandon their ethnic dresses in personal as well as in social life in Totopara except during the days of their ethnic Manka Festival.

For availability of multiple livelihood scopes in the modern surrounding world, entire Toto tribal community, particularly the younger generation, has been transforming with their involvement towards newer form of economic activities as their livelihoods. Toto tribal ethnicity is also considerably compromised in the transformed globalized environment in Totopara. In the opinion of the Toto People, Toto culture and tribal ethnicity are strongly influenced and affected due to presence of majority Non-toto people in Totopara. For protecting Toto tribal culture and ethnicity, a social organization, namely Toto Young Group, has been formed by the educated younger Toto generation which is currently led by Mr. Prakash Toto, the Principal, and Mr. Abhishek Toto, the Teacher, of Chittaranjan Toto Memorial Education Centre.

Totos are gradually becoming marginalized in Totopara due to massive dominance of people of other communities with their globalized modern culture and life style. Due to such dominance of Non-toto people in Totopara and rapid changes in surrounding world, Toto culture, dresses, food habits, houses and their tribal ethnicity have already been considerably transformed. People of Non-Toto communities in Totopara are always trying to deceive this illiterate tribe, either by encroaching their land or by converting their tribal ethnicity. Two Toto families have been compelled to convert into Christianity for the sake of favourable fortune to combat against poverty. Toto culture and ethnicity are really in front of danger due to aggressive dominance of Non-Toto people in Totopara and rapid socio-economic changes in and around the surrounding world.

**Regarding present socio-economic status of the Toto tribal people in the light of their transformed ethnicity**

Analyzing data collected from the literature survey and field data survey, following findings have been noticed as regards to present socio-economic status of the Toto tribal people at Totopara village in the light of their transformed ethnicity:



Totopara is located at the furthest northern corner of West Bengal as an isolated hamlet. Due to its remoteness, transportation from and to Totopara is not easily accessible due to lack of direct road communication from the nearest Railway station or from the District Town. Totopara can be reached from the Railway station or from the District Town by kachcha jungle road crossing several riverbeds through forest. Apart from private and rented vehicles, only two private buses run twice a day from Birpara to Totopara via Madarihat. Therefore, remoteness of Totopara village from the rest of West Bengal is one of the prime responsible factors for its backwardness.

All the Toto tribal people own their residential lands in Totopara. Most of the Toto houses are kachcha modern house. A good number of Toto houses are pacca modern house with kachcha roof; but, in present days, one can rarely find Toto ethnic hut inside Totopara village made with tree leaves and bamboos. Average number of family members in a Toto family is ranging from 5 to 9. Average monthly income of a Toto family is ranging from Rs. 5,000 to Rs. 12,000, which, in their opinion, is inadequate to sustain their family. Even in present days, Toto marriage mostly takes place within the Toto community; very few of Toto marriage takes place with the Non-toto people in Totopara or outside Totopara.

Although there is one Govt.-aided primary school, one Govt.-aided high school and one private missionary primary school in Totopara apart from aforementioned Chittaranjan Toto Memorial Education Centre, a school set up by the initiative of Toto people where Toto language is optionally taught. Literacy rate among the Toto tribal community is remarkably low. A computer training centre was running in Totopara during pre-pandemic period, but that has been shut down in present days due to COVID 19 pandemic situation. In Totopara, there is one Govt. Health Centre and a Gramin Bank.

Almost all the Toto people have got Scheduled Tribe (ST) Certificate from the Govt. In spite of holding ST Certificate, out of the total 1,632 present Toto population in Totopara, only 36 Toto people are working in Govt. sector. Negligible women from the Toto tribal community are working in Govt. sector. Ms. Rita Toto, the first lady Toto graduate in Totopara, is now working in the Backward Class Welfare Department, Govt. of West Bengal.

Most of the Toto people own agricultural land in Totopara; very few of them own agricultural land outside Totopara. Majority of the Toto people are still engaged in agricultural activities in nearby lands as their livelihoods. A section of Toto people is engaged as daily labour in

agricultural lands owned by others. A good number of Toto people were engaged as daily labour with the cultivation process in Bhutan during pre-pandemic period, but they have lost such occupational opportunity in present days due to COVID 19 pandemic situation. A weekly market (locally named as Hat) of agricultural as well as non-agricultural produces is arranged at the heart of Totopara village on every Tuesday.

In the opinion of the Toto people, their social, economic and cultural status is strongly influenced by the intervention of Non-toto people in Totopara. It is strongly alleged by the Toto people that lands of Toto people in Totopara are forcibly encroached by the neighboring Non-Toto people. For the distress in their socio-economic life, Toto people blame trespassing presence of Non-Toto people, especially Nepali people, in Totopara. In the opinion of Totos, they are strongly dominated by Non-Toto people in Totopara. As per notion of the Toto people, Non-toto people are unwanted in Totopara; on the other hand, Non-Toto people don't think so, as they have been permanently dwelling in Totopara for a long period of time.

Therefore, socio-economic status of Toto tribal community in Totopara is not at all satisfactory even in present days. On one hand, literacy and income levels, involvement in Govt. service etc. of the Toto people are still unsatisfactory. In spite of holding ST Certificate, Toto people have not been upgraded up to the expected level to secure Govt. jobs. On the other hand, lands, especially agricultural lands, of the Toto people in Totopara are being unlawfully encroached by the neighboring Non-Toto people, which results in livelihood crisis as well as existence crisis of the Totos even in their homeland.

### **Conclusions and Suggestions**

It is evident from the undertaken study that Totos have even been induced to abandon their ethnic houses, dresses, food habits in personal as well as in social life in Totopara. Toto culture and tribal ethnicity is strongly affected due to presence of majority Non-Toto people in Totopara with their aggressive culture and pattern of life style. Toto language is also under severe crisis in the social life at Totopara. Toto tribal ethnicity is also considerably compromised in the transformed globalized environment in Totopara. Main conflict area between the Toto tribal ethnicity and globalized modern world is dominating presence of majority Non-Toto people in Totopara with their cosmopolitan culture and life style. Thus, Totos tribal rituals and ethnicity are gradually becoming marginalized in Totopara due to dominance of people from other

communities. Although majority of the Toto tribal people are still engaged in agricultural activities in nearby lands, yet the educated younger Toto generation has been gradually transforming with their involvement towards newer form of economic activities as their livelihoods due to accessibility of broader scope of employment in outside globalized world. In short, Toto culture, rituals and ethnicity are in front of real danger due to aggressive dominance of Non-Toto people in Totopara and also for influence of rapid socio-economic changes in their surroundings. On the other hand, socio-economic status of Toto tribal community in Totopara is not at all satisfactory even in modern days. On one hand, literacy rates, income levels, involvement in Govt. service etc. among the Toto people are still very unsatisfactory. Most of the Toto people are still engaged in agricultural activities as their livelihoods. On the other hand, agricultural lands of the Toto people in Totopara are being forcibly acquired by the neighboring Non-Toto people, especially Nepali people, which results in crucial livelihood crisis as well as existence crisis of the Toto people even in their homeland. If no strong remedial measure is taken from the Govt. level for safeguarding lands of Toto people in Totopara, existence of this smallest group of ethnic tribal community will be at the doorstep of severe challenge soon.

Following suggestions are made for protecting Toto tribal ethnicity and for upgrading socio-economic status of the Toto tribal community living in Totopara:

1. Essentiality of mass education should be widely campaigned among the Toto tribal community.
2. Widespread educational facilities and arrangement of financial assistance for the Toto tribal community as a whole should be strongly extended by the Govt.
3. Awareness regarding rights protected by the Indian Constitution and facilities provided by the Govt. for the primitive tribal group should be intensively campaigned among the Toto tribal community.
4. Lands of the Toto people in Totopara village should be strictly protected by the Govt. from illegal encroaching by others.
5. Various modern employment opportunities should be created by the Govt. for the Toto people.
6. All possible remedial measures should be taken by the Govt. for protecting Toto culture and ethnicity in Totopara village.

## Study on Socio-Economic Status and Transformed Ethnicity of the Toto Tribe in WB

7. Toto language should be promoted and protected by the Govt.
8. Toto language should be compulsorily taught for the Toto children studying in schools in Totopara.
9. Illegal migrants in Totopara village should be strictly controlled and restricted by the Govt.
10. Transportation facility between Totopara and local District Headquarter and nearest Railway Station should be upgraded as far as practicable.

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10. Mr. Sankar Toto, a Farmer of Totopara.

*# Dates of interview taken in Totopara, Alipurduar, WB, for the purpose of undertaken study during April 12 to 16, 2019 and April 6 to 9, 2022.*

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