

Socio economic and demographic aspects of the Toto tribe in the district of Alipurduar, West Bengal

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ABSTRACT

The Toto is a primitive tribe (Indo-Bhutanees) residing in an isolated area of Alipurduar district surrounded by the Torsa River in the east, the foothills of Bhutan in the north, and the Titi Reserve forest in the west and south. Toto is one of the smallest endogamous tribal groups belonged to the Mongoloid. They are categorised as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group or PVTG previously known as a Primitive tribal group (PTG). They are getting attention and getting aids for their economic subsistence. This paper aims to examine socio-economic and demographic conditions of the Toto people with special reference to Madarihat Block in the district of Alipurduar district, West Bengal. The Totos are generally divided into thirteen exogamous clans of family and their settlement area is divided into six distinct hamlets. The present study focuses on the society, income status, Educational status, population, food habit, house type, communication, occupations and health status of the Toto community.

Keywords: Toto community, PVTG, Socio-economic status, demographic, Alipurduar district, West Bengal.

Introduction

W.J. Perry defines the term "tribe" as a group speaking a common dialect and inhabiting a common territory (Jaganath, 1984). Tribe is generally defined as a "collection of families on group of families bearing a common name members of which occupy the same territory, speak the same language and observe certain taboos regarding marriage, profession or occupation and have developed a well assigned system of reciprocity and mutuality of obligation" (Madan & Majumder, 1956). The Dictionary of Sociology defines the tribe as a "social group, usually with a defined area, dialect, cultural homogeneity and unifying social organization. The term 'tribe' has a Latin root. It has carried different connotations in different countries. 'Toto' community belonging to deprived section, is a rare community in India. The Toto tribe of Madarihat Block of Alipurduar District in Northern part of West Bengal is one of the most endangered tribes of the state with very low existing population. They have kept up a distinct identity of their own with their unique socio economic and cultural life even though they have come in contact with progressive population of the area (Nitisha, 2015). This cultural distinctiveness of the Totos has made them distinguishable among all other tribes of West Bengal (Dawn, 2014). Totos are reputed as Mongoloid people, with flat nose, small eyes, broad and wide cheeks (Sinha and Pal, 1983). There are 38 tribal groups and 3 primitive tribal groups such as Birhor, Lodhas and Totos in the state of West Bengal. Totos are the most important endangered tribal group with small size population, live exclusively only in Totopara in the district of Alipurduar, West Bengal. *Toto tribe* is selected purposively in view the concentration of this PTG in Alipurduar district of West Bengal (Seal, 2016). The term 'Socio economic aspects' is often discussed in broad term as satisfaction of needs, feelings of well-being, good or bad working conditions, and other indicators. Such a conceptualization of it encompasses all the material aspects of human life, and may extend beyond to cover the physical and psychological dimensions. It covers diverse and innumerable human need. Human needs at the elementary level may include essentials of survival like drinking water, perpetuation needs, shelter and warmth. Tribal people are primitive residents of our country. But, it is a glooming fact, even after six decades of independence, the tribes of our country are drowned in several problems. In those problems, it is very interesting to other people to know how they live like that poor condition which thing & matter, incidents are driven factor of that purpose (Paul et al, 2015). The socio-economic status of the tribal varies according to different sub tribes i.e, their education level and income level are different for example; most

of the Sabar tribe are illiterate and lived in confined forest area and do not have sufficient source of income where as Toto depend on agriculture as their major livelihood and their literacy and income level were comparatively higher than other tribals. The scenario of the economy of these tribal communities is not well. The monthly income of the tribes is very low. In some households, where the annual income is very low, their number of family members is large. It is very difficult to meet the basic demand of life with this small amount of income. Those who are practicing agriculture, survive on agriculture at subsistence level till now. Commercial farming is rare among them. Therefore, it can be said that the change is observed among these tribes but the scenario of economic improvement is rare to be seen. The socio-economic and living conditions of the Totos provide several factors that are directly and indirectly responsible for the socio-economic backwardness, poverty and financial obligation in this Primitive Tribal Group of West Bengal (Das, 2011).

Aim of the study

1) To understand the various social aspects of their life 2) To know about their economy and standard of living 3) To understand their demographic and cultural aspects. 4) To understand their health problems and healthcare services.

Sources of Data and Methodology

The work is mainly based on secondary data which has been collected from Census Report 2011, Backward Classes Welfare Department, and Government of West Bengal, published and unpublished articles, articles in journals. The available secondary data has been analysed and processed on the basis of which an inference has been drawn. Other sources of secondary data include District Census Handbook, various Censuses of India, North Bengal Development Department, and Ministry of Tribal Affairs. Different important informations from the internet have also been incorporated to get the critical understanding of the study.

Society



Image of Dhaniram Toto showing his creation of script and alphabets for his language (Dengka)

Toto's language and culture are very unique and totally distinguished from the neighbouring tribes like Koch and Bhutanese Sharchop (Singh, 2014). But they have no alphabets for their language. A most literate person of the Toto Community named Dhaniram Toto has been trying to create the script and alphabets for his language (Dengka). According to Dhaniram Toto, all the people of the world could have separate letters and languages, why would the Totos be deprived of that? He has already shaped a 37-letter alphabet with the help of an Australian. Toto family is patrilineal in nature dominated by nuclear type. However, joint family is not rare. Monogamy is common form of marriage among the Toto but polygamy is not prohibited. Totos generally do not have more than one wife. If a man's wife dies, he may marry the deceased wife's younger sister, but a woman cannot marry her deceased husband's brother which indicates gender discrimination. 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., (1) marriage by negotiation (Thulbehoea), (2) marriage by escape (Chor-behoea), (3) marriage by capture

(Sambehoea) and (4) love marriage (Lamalami). There is no custom of divorce among the Totos.

Food habits

Toto tribe generally uses as food rice, marua chura (parched rice), milk and curd though food from marua (a kind of millet) are their main food. They also eat meat of goat, pork, venison and poultry. Different kinds of fish are also added to their food table. There is no gender discrimination in taking foods of all kinds. They also drink fermented liquor named Haria Eu, made of marua, rice powder and malt. The staple food comprises of rice, parched rice, milk and curd.

House

The status of the Toto tribe is very simple. Totos live in eminent bamboo huts. These are raised on machas (raised platforms), and have straw thatches. There is a single log placed to get to the hut, and this log is meant to be drawn up at night. According to Basak et al Totos live in an elevated bamboo huts, identifying themselves as Hindu and practice kindred marriage, whereby they stay in the same neighborhood even after the marriage (Basak et al. 2009). Nowadays, some Totos are exclusively living in pucca and semi pucca houses (Daw, 2015). This improvement is due to their economic development and houses provided by government of India in the form of Indra Awas Yojana Gramin or houses provided by the state government i.e., Gitanjali Yojana.

Communication

From the Totopara area to Madarirhat town there are several rivers i.e, around 13 rivers. Titi river covers around 2km way which is the main road to reach Totopara. While crossing the river way, they have to be very careful that any small boulder can come under your foot and cause severe injury.



During the rainy season, the conditions of the road become worst as all the roads flooded under the water. There is an absence of any kind of transport connectivity to Totopara and to reach there, people have to cross several dry rivers which are filled up with water during the monsoon season (Mukherjee, 2017). Even today, the entire Totopara-Ballaguri area doesn't have any kind of road connectivity.

Getway to the Totopara i.e, Dinesh Toto Road

Population

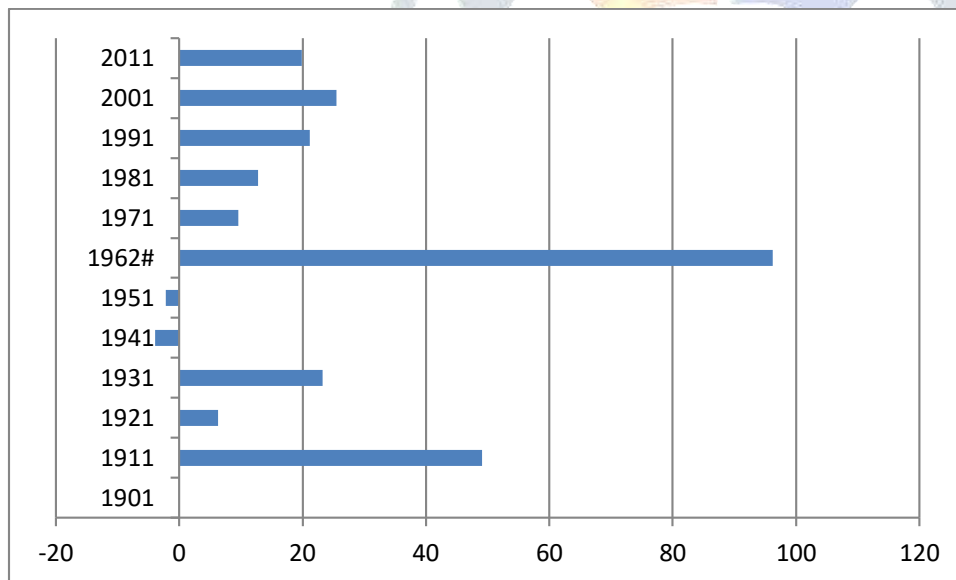
The Census report of 1901 made possible to know the actual number of Toto population. In 1901, the total population was 171, comprising only 36 households. At that time The Toto community was the world's smallest community. According to the India census (2011) the population of Toto tribe is 1387 among which 737 are males and 650 are females and sex ratio was 882 females per 1000 males. In 1901, out of 171 Toto population 72 were male and 99 were female. But sex ratio was very high i.e, 1375 females per 1000 males.

Table ; Population distribution and sex ratio among Toto people of Totopara, Aipurduar District

Census	Total population	Decadal Growth Rate	Male	Female	Sex Ratio (female/1000male)
1901	171	72	99	1375
1911	255	49.12	125	110	880
1921	271	6.27	40	131	636
1931	334	23.25	130	204	1569
1941	321	-3.89	159	162	1019
1951	321	-2.18	161	160	994
1962#	616	96.18	106	189	917
1971	675	9.58	257	269	978
1981	762	12.74	362	350	967
1991	922	21.16	470	457	972
2001	1157	25.49	620	575	927
2011	1387	19.88	737	650	882

Data are elaborated from Census Data from 1901 to 2011, # means ISI=Indian Stastical Institute.

In 1951, the total Toto population was only 314. It is clear from the figure 1 that during the period of 1901 to 1991, the Toto population constitutes steady growth rate. But during the period of 1941 to 1951, the decadal growth rate was negative. The main reason of this negative growth rate was that the Toto had to face challenge of extinction during these periods. After that time especially in 1956 the medical system was introduced after which growth rate of population start increasing. As consequence, the decadal growth rate of population was at the apex during sixties. This period shows the expanding phase of demography transition of the tribe.

Figure 1: Decadal growth rate of Toto population.

Total Toto population was only 321 individuals in 1951 (first census after independence and partition of India), but now the population has increased to about 1387 in 2011(Census, 2011). After 1951, the Totos have been coming more and more in contact with the outside world and undergoing a process of cultural and development changes (Singh & pal, 1983). Until 1901, there was no any other community except Toto. Totos were the sole inhabitants of Totopara in 1901. But in 2011 they shared only 23.46% of the total population of Totopara. Beside the Toto, twenty Six other communities live in Totopara.

Educational status

The percentage of literacy is comparatively low among the Toto tribe than the other communities. About 30.35% of the tribe are literate. The male literacy of Toto tribe is 36.36% while the female literacy of that tribe is 23.53% in the area, which is also very low as compared to the national male and female literacy rate of 82.14% and 65.46% respectively (Census of India, 2011). According to the Census(2011), the percentage of literacy generally decreases with the increase in level of education. At the level of education from class VI to VII, there are only 5.19 per cent out of total Toto population, at the Secondary level of education there are 2.96 per cent and 1.30 per cent at the Higher Secondary level of education and only 0.79 per cent has attended college so far. The total number of graduate person at Totopara is 11, out of which 9 are male and 2 are female among the total population of the Totopara (2011).

Health Problems



Image of Totopara Primary Health Centre

Health status of the toto tribe is very poor. Tribal people, having common issues related to poor health indicator, high morbidity and mortality level and lack of proper health care services (Govt. of India, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2013). They are suffering from the communicable and non-communicable diseases. The common ailments among the Totos include the Tropical Diseases like hookworm infection, cold and cough, dysentery, diarrhoea, ulcer, yaws, malaria etc.(Dawn,2014).Their food habit ,occupation, living condition in unhygienic and their location are the prominent reasons for their heavy burden of diseases. They had also been suffering from the genetic disease Thalassaemia. According to the blood report

by the Netajee Subhas Chandra Bose Cancer research Institute(NSCBCRI), 14 percent of the sampled people were exposed to Thalassaemia(Bose, 2009).This disease has taken place more sever among them because they are very conservative. Apart from this, in order to maintain their ethnicity they marry their cousins (Ali, 1980).Females and children are very exposed to cough and dysentery due to deficiency of vitamins A, D, B complex, calcium and iodine. The study by Sengupta described that almost three quarters of women in the Toto community are underweight with poor nutrition, which threatens their capacity to contribute firstly to the survival and secondly to the economic development of their tribe(Sengupta, 2015) The most common disease malaria was the silent killer among them. Due to less immunity power, they are exposing to new diseases. But nowadays, with the spread of educational and economic development among them, Totos are getting more conscious about their health problems. Primary health problems are served by recently established Primary health centre. But for the treatment of serious illnesses or diagnostic purposes they go to Birpara Rural hospital as well as Alipurduar district Hospital. But in the Rainy season they are confined in the primary health centre or they have to wait to take treatment from the outside due to the overflow of river because river is the main way to go outside. They are largely dependent on traditional healers and self medication who use medicinal plants for curing the diseases like ulcers and headache, stomach trouble, cold and cough, bleeding from wounds, diarrhoea, eye inflammation and night blindness, bleeding of gums, fever, small pox, scorpion bite, swelling, blood pressure, labour pain fever (Sarkar, 1993)

Religion and Traditional Richness:

Totos have about 26 different clans in total and everybody has same surname 'Toto'. In the clan, they are also subdivided into several minor categories. They worship nature like forest, fire, mother earth, river and wind against idol worship and mazar worship. In that, Khula Nala (small rivers) is their main God. They do rooster sacrifice or bali and gives their blood to the almighty to impress them. They sacrifice ceremony done in a very delighted manner. There is a tradition that in which river and which colour of rooster sacrifice to be performed and with proper prescribe day and time Toto tribe is assumed to be hindu. They worship two main gods; Ishpa and Cheima. According to them, God Ishpa lives in the Bhutan hills and he causes sickness when come down from hill. The Totos have no priests and offer their worship and sacrifices on their own. Ishpa is worshipped in the open outside the house and Cheima inside the house.

Occupation & Incomes:

At different stages of time, the Toto tribe has been shifted from a subsistence economy to market economy. In the past, Totos were dependent on forest hunting and food gathering for their livelihood. Afterward, they were engaged in animal husbandry like cattle rearing of pig, cow, goat and agriculture like maize, finger millet, areca seeds, cardamom, ginger, orange, sal, chegun etc. In his syudy "The Socio-economic Status And Education....." Sarkar that Totos, one of the primitive Himalayan tribe in the country, usually work as day labourers and porters carrying oranges from Bhutan to the local market in North Bengal and some of Totos are engaged in cultivation in their own land(Sarkar, 2015). Further, the transformations of the village from community ownership of land to individual land holding and from isolated tribal group to a multi-ethnic habitat have also taken place in the recent past. The main economic activity of the Totos includes cultivation of land. However, their daily routine and occupation are changing due to the effect of modernization. Shifting cultivation, fishing, weaving and hunting are now not the prime occupations for them as because the modernisation has influence the occupation of people in now days. The Totos are not advanced in farming. They do not know the process of multi crops as well as proper utilization of chemical fertilizers/pesticides and hence they cultivate a particular crop to a great extent in traditional process. Every household has a small garden surrounded by bamboo fences; in these gardens they grow vegetables, potatoes and bananas, among others. Sometimes they trade with traders from the outside areas. Some Totos practice animal husbandry by domesticating cows and pigs. Their main source of livelihood is cattle rearing and particularly pigs rearing. Pigs rearing is done just under the first floor of their home. Sometimes they have to go other states/ countries as migrated labourer. Some Totos are engaged in rajmistry, grocery shop, stationary shop in their locality. Totopara is a habitation of various type of migrated communities such as Bhutanese, Nepalese ,Bangali, Bihari, Totos and other tribes. As Totos are surrounded by them, Nepalese and bihari people influence them and have good control over most of the economic activity of the area (Chaudhary, 2009). Due to the introduction of MGNREGA, the Toto people are working as labourers under the different projects. But the number of working days is less and the delay to get the wage is also another problem. Their limited education is another hindrance to shift to any other economic activity. At present some educated toto are engaged in different kind of jobs; both in public sectors and govt, sectors. However, Totos are covered under Schedule Tribes and are given legal protection under the Article 342 and 366 of the Indian Constitution. But being a Particularly vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) they are not able to avail the special benefits covered under PVTGs. Hence, Toto's struggle has interwoven with low economic, social and political status.

Conclusion: The study finds out that the socio-economic and demographic status of the Toto community is backward. The Toto Tribe has been identified as one of the 'Endangered Tribes' of West Bengal who are on the verge of extinction. A majority Toto people are illiterate. Lack of education, poverty and lack of communication and lack of cultivation knowledge make them backward and underdeveloped. But in recent years some improvement in their lifestyle has been observed owing to their direct contact with the progressive population of the outside world. Several efforts have been taken by the Government to look up literacy rate, healthcare system etc. among them. The status of health and education

are prominent indicators of human development that have always been in a poor state among them, though these aspects have now been taken up by the Government of the State for improvement.

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