

AFTERWORD

At the end of our study on the cultural and economic transformation of the Totos, it may be pertinent to once again point out, as was briefly hinted at in the Introductory Chapter, that the whole study has been carried on without taking any explicit recourse to any theoretical formulations. The most important limitation of the study lies there. At the same time, it must be conceded that it may not be feasible to adequately do so for as long as we do not have firstly, a comprehensive history of State Formation in Bhutan and Cooch Behar, secondly, good ethnographic account of the Doyas, the Toktops and other kindreds of the Totos living inside Bhutan, and finally, parallel synthetic studies on particularly the Mech and the Rabhas of north Bengal.

In brief, what is necessary is to have a wider view of things, and not to treat the Totos as a closed community fit for only to be partially treated without making any reference to their geographical surroundings cutting across the political boundary lines. In other words, the canvas for the Totos both temporally and spatially should be wide open to accommodate all the nuances of their becoming. Needless to say that even while

one may be aware of this requirement, it is not immediately possible to implement the same in practice because of the limitations of data.

The other weakness of the present study is that it was not initiated with any deliberate design right from the very outset. The author began the study as an amateur, and only gradually felt the urge to prepare a systematic account of the Totos. As a result, the methodological niceties could not be consistently adhered to. It is only gradually that the situation became clearer to him in course of his investigation. But the benefit of hindsight could not be used often at its proper place or time. However, it must be remembered that in the beginning only the reports of Sanyal and Das were available in which there were lot of piecemeal information on disconnected items like food, clothing, festival or the language of the Totos. On the other hand, the dissertation by Roy Burman was so voluminous and diffused in focus evenwhile containing brilliant insights that it was difficult to form a stable idea of the community. The present author had benefitted immensely from all the exercises that have gone in the past but, he had to redraw the canvas and work out a modest framework of his own so that both the trees and the wood were visible, and either of them did not impinge itself on the other.

Roy Burman had put forward the view that the Totos were

a product of Bhutia statecraft in the past. If so, the Doyas and any other small community living in the southern border region of Bhutan might equally be a product of similar circumstances. A study of physical anthropology and languages of all such kindred communities may possibly shed further light in the future upon this vexed question.

At present however, as was pointed out, the Totos are grouped together with the Bhutias including Sherpa, Dukpa, Kagatay, Tibetan and Yolmo for official purposes. The distinction between the Bhutias and the Tibetans is more of a political nature. The Bhutias are Tibetans who have been naturalised in India. The term Tibetan is at present reserved exclusively for those who are the refugees from Tibet migrating to India in the wake of the flight of Dalai Lama from Tibet. The Dukpas are such Bhutanese of Tibetan origin who subscribe to the Druk-pa sect of Tibetan Buddhism and, they are the ruling community of present day Bhutan. Some Dukpas are traditionally settled in the Buxaduar area of Jalpaiguri district bordering Bhutan and as such, they are Indian citizens. The Drukpas are also known as Druku (in the popular parlance of Bhutan) or as Yul-Mi (literally people without land or, settlers). The Sherpa, Kagatay and Yolmo are also originally of Tibetan extraction but they are gradually being absorbed within the fold of greater Nepali identity. Therefore, as to why the Totos are clubbed together with such people is difficult to be comprehended.

Further, as has been observed, there is a definite process of acculturation of the Totos with the Nepalis on the one hand and the Bengalis on the other. From a small population of bare 144 in 1870s the Nepalis have become 1.09 lakhs in 1961 in the Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal. The whole of Duars region is inhabited by them. As such, the small communities living in the Duars area are being gradually absorbed within the fold of the Nepalis. The Nepalis are much liberal in matters of marriage and divorce, and thus they appear to be ever ready to accommodate the Totos in their midst. There was a time when acculturation with the Mech or the Rajbangshis was the only natural outcome. But at present the situation has changed in favour of agglomeration with the Nepalis.

But, the official clubbing together of the Toto, Bhutia, Sherpa, Dukpa, Kagatey, Tibetan and Yolmo communities is neither in consonance with the logic of ethnography nor the direction of history. Therefore, considerable rethinking on this issue is greatly needed and further research in this regard is immediately called for.

The process of tribe - caste continuum for whatever it is worth does not appear to be operative any longer with the change of circumstances. After the enlistment of Meches as a Scheduled Tribe, the mobility of Mech to Rajbangshi has ceased because such mobility does not entitle oneself to any extra

benefit. Further, the transition of Totos into Mech (as was reported by Sanyal) has also become unlikely because of the overwhelming influence of the Nepalis rather than the Meches in the whole of Duars region during the last 50-60 years. Therefore, the Totos are likely to be aryanised through their induction into the camp of the Nepalis or Bengalis, whatever the case may be. The medium of instruction and the political mileage is in favour of their incorporation into the Bengali fold. Be whatever it may, the small communities like the Totos will be transformed in course of time into a larger linguistic community even while retaining a dual identity for quite some time to come. The Toto identity would be operative at the private and intimate level for certain purposes, while the crystallisation around the Nepali or Bengali identity would be the general picture to be encountered in public life particularly beyond the jurisdiction of their immediate village boundaries. The policy planners may help foster their future development in the right direction by keeping all these in mind.

In short the tribal identity derived through kinship at the genetic level would in course of time be replaced by a community identity derived at the level of cultural and linguistic affinities. The religious mooring of a community is also particularly important in this connection. As we have seen, the animistic beliefs and practices of the Totos was in the process

of being gradually substituted wherever necessary and synthesized with the broad spectrum of Drukpa Buddhism. Even some of the more important festivals of the Totos were having a direct link with their communication with the Bhutanese. At present the ground realities have changed and, the Totos are poised for a big change. The old rules of the society and institutions that had survived under a different set of circumstances have become largely obsolete and infructuous. The pattern of economy and livelihood have also changed. As a result the religious beliefs and ritual practices have lost much of their relevance, and continue to exist as atavistic relics. Hinduism in its popular form has not yet made any inroads into the Toto society. The vacuum may therefore be easily filled in by the organised efforts of the Christian Missions. It has been a part of the official policy to protect and preserve whatever is tribal unmindful of the fact that along with changes that are being brought at the economic level and also the rise of expectations that is consciously propagated there may be a natural urge of the tribals also to come up of age and be an equal partner with everyone in all matters. From the fact that the daughter and the son of the erstwhile Gapu of the village have converted themselves into Christinity, appropriate lessons should be drawn.

The question of protective discrimination of the tribals should be resolved after weighing carefully the pros and cons of

what is to be protected and what discarded. In as much as economic development is a part of deliberate design, similarly the social upliftment also should be taken due care of. The ancient property rights of male equigeniture is a case in point. This practice cannot survive under a changed set of circumstances in the near future. A society should be helped to reform itself from within rather than be allowed to ignore the need of adjustments that have become essential if it wants to survive.

As to why there are differential responses to modernisation on the part of the different clans of the Totos needs to be further investigated. The quantitative as also the qualitative growth of the clans like Dantrobei, Dankobei and Linkaijibei is more impressive than that of others. Whether the future class differences within the Toto society would emerge along clan lines or not would be an interesting feature to be observed.

However, the prosperity and decline of the village Totopara as a whole would depend upon the volume of transit trade. Totopara no longer enjoys the advantage it once had of being an important point on the trade route between India and Bhutan. The diversion of traffic to vehicular modes of transport via Funtsholling has dealt a heavy blow against the comparative prosperity and the future prospects of the village. The political unrest in the southern parts of Bhutan has also raised the apprehension of the Bhutanese Government against the free flow of goods and

people across Totopara. But the abrupt blockade imposed unilaterally by the Government of Bhutan has not helped its own citizens either. The Doyas as also the Nepali residents of south Bhutan would definitely benefit along with the Totos if a comprehensive developmental plan for this part of the frontier is worked out jointly by both the Governments of Bhutan and India.