

## CHAPTER - I

### INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 SURVEY OF LITERATURE
- 1.2 BACKGROUND AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY
- 1.3 THE GEO-PHYSICAL CONDITION OF THE VILLAGE TOTOPARA
- 1.4 METHOD OF ENQUIRY

Towards north the district of Jalpaiguri in West Bengal is abutted by the Himalayan foothills. The characteristics of the sub-Himalayas are more prominently displayed as one proceeds to the boundaries of Bhutan, and recede gradually as one goes to the south to the plains of Cooch Behar and Bangladesh. The village of Totopara where the Totos live is situated in the hills bordering Bhutan. A small community of 926 souls, the Totos are at present known to live in only one village isolated from the rest of the world by a difficult terrain. The objective of the present study is to know about the cultural and economic transformation over time of the small tribe of Totos living in the sub-Himalayas.

"Culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole", according to Tylor, "which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other

capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Tylor:1). 'Acquired' is the key word of this definition, because it means that culture is the product of social learning, and that the differences in cultural development are due to the progress in cultural knowledge. Anthropologists have long been concerned about how and under what circumstances human groups are transformed from savagery to barbarism to civilization. Whereas some are inclined to give more importance to evolution, others would emphasize the influences of migration and diffusion. Further, in a schema of unilinear development sequence the people at the level of a tribe is expected to emerge into a state. Simultaneously with this transition the economy of the tribe also is supposed to progressively develop into feudalism to capitalism to socialism in the thinking of theoreticians belonging to the school of historical materialism. However scholars like Morton H. Fried believes that tribe or state are both secondary phenomena for most of the extant cases, and as such exogenous factors have to be paid due attention while writing about the transformation of a human group.

Be what it may, it is not immediately possible to write about the Totos against the background of any specific high theories that are available on the subject. It is primarily so because the minimum amount of information and knowledge that are a pre-requisite for such an endeavour is unfortunately not yet available. Even the present work in hand will fall short of this requirement although the objective of the study is to fill up as

many gaps as possible, and to present a comprehensive and systematic account of the Totos in transition. It is expected that through more of such works on Totos as also their neighbouring communities, the building blocks would be ready for a more meaningful work in the future.

### 1.1 SURVEY OF LITERATURE

At this stage it would be more appropriate to examine briefly the major works that have been conducted on the Totos. The Totos were taken note of by the British administrators from the close of the 19th century. D. Sunder, who was in charge of settlement operations in western Duars in 1889-1894, has left some notes about their habits and language covering about seven pages. J. Milligan who conducted the second survey during 1906-1916 has described the Totos in barely two pages. The third survey was conducted by B. Mukherjee in 1931-35 but he left a very brief note on the Totos covering only half a page. Meanwhile the Jalpaiguri District Gazetteer was published in 1911 where only one page was devoted to the Totos. Also G.A. Grierson in his Linguistic Survey of India (1909) made the first serious attempt to study the language of the Totos. The fragmentary bits of information that may be culled from the above sources are of immense importance. But, by themselves, they do not make, by any stretch of imagination, a full account of the Totos.

Dr. Charu Chandra Sanyal wrote one or two newspaper articles on the Totos in 1947. But the first serious writing on the Totos came from pen of A. Mitra who was in charge of Census operations in West Bengal in 1951. He appended a valuable note on the Totos of Totopara to the District Hand-book of Jalpaiguri (1951), published by the Census authorities. Unfortunately Dr. Sanyal has labelled the note by Mitra as 'some scraps of information' (Sanyal:10). But it was A. Mitra who for the first time realised the importance of publicising about the Totos. His concern for them is reflected when he says, "Excluded from the President of India's list of seven scheduled tribes in West Bengal, the Toto suffers an anonymity which is wholly undeserved. He has the unique distinction of belonging to a very rare race; it lives in only one village in the wide world, has a spoken language of its own, and numbers only about 325 souls" (Mitra:CCXV).

A few years after this, Dr. Sanyal published a long article on the Totos in the Journal of the Asiatic Society, Calcutta, in 1955. Valuable discussions were made by him in that article about the Toto settlements in western Duars, social and domestic life of the Totos and their language. But the item-wise description of various traits lacked synthesis, and there was also hardly any temporal perspective excepting the brief digression on the previous Toto settlements. Further, the discussion on the language of the Totos constituted the bulk of his writing.

In 1973, the article was re-published after adding fresh notes to it based on his re-visits to Totopara in 1960 and 1972. However, despite these additions the work could not rise much above 'the pioneer efforts of an amateur' (Sanyal:iv).

The first and the only dissertation so far on the Totos was made by B.K. Roy Burman during the mid-50s. His first encounter with the Totos was undertaken in February 1955 with limited administrative purpose. A few months before that, Jogendra Sarkar, the Welfare Organiser at Totopara, had mysteriously disappeared. It was alleged that he was murdered by some Nepalis because of his vigorous attempts to stop continuous encroachment of Toto land by them. In January 1955, Roy Burman was posted at Jalpaiguri as the Tribal Welfare Officer of the district. He availed of the earliest opportunity to visit Totopara and study the pattern of relationship between the Toto and the Nepali. In his own words, "I could not fail to observe the symbiotic relation that had grown up between them in the economic sphere" (Roy Burman:7). Soon after this limited study he left for Calcutta being appointed as the Cultural Research Officer of the State Government. But he continued with his study on the Totos. As he said, "I took up the process of acculturation of the Toto as a result of culture contact as the subject of my study at Totopara. This study also was undertaken with a practical end in view, as I was required to assist the State Government in developing a comprehensive programme of welfare of the Toto" (Roy Burman:8). Out of this effort came the

doctoral dissertation submitted by him to the University of Calcutta in 1959 entitled Dynamics of Persistence and Change of a Small Community - The Toto. The Thesis was divided into the following major chapters : (1) Morphological Outline, (2) Becoming a Tribe, (3) Transfer of Power from the Bhutia to the British and Consequent Changes, (4) Culture Contact as a Process and a Product, (5) Pattern of Interaction Between Ecology and Culture, (6) Persistence and Change of Some Diacritical Elements of Toto Culture, (7) Old and New Complexes about Food, (8) Facets of Toto Economy, (9) Organisation and Reorganisation of Toto Kinship, (10) Man and Supernatural, (11) Village Organisation and Power Pattern. Unfortunately Roy Burman did not take any initiative in publishing his whole thesis which contains many valuable insights. But it must be mentioned that the rapid changes that were to overtake this small community were in that period not very well delineated. The culture contact as also the developmental efforts have become more pronounced since then making it imperative to undertake a fresh investigation.

After Roy Burman had completed his work, a few more studies of some importance on the Totos appeared in print in subsequent years. Of them, mention may be made of the following. P. Chakrabarti and K. Chattopadhyay published an article on 'Some Aspects of Toto Ethnography' in the Bulletin of the Cultural Research Institute, Calcutta. In the same number of the Bulletin appeared one of the very few published articles by Roy Burman

about the Totos, entitled 'A Note on the Socio-Medical Survey among the Totos'. In 1969, the then Deputy Director of the Cultural Research Institute, Amal Kumar Das, published a monograph on The Totos. For the first time there appeared in print a working hand-book on the Totos covering a brief discussion on settlement and history, village, flora & fauna, physical features, dialect, population, domestic life, economic activities, social organisation, social life, religious beliefs and practices, village organisation, diseases, and the Tribal Welfare Centre at Totopara. "The report thus prepared", Das hoped, "would be helpful in giving an up-to-date systematic profile of the Toto society in nut-shell, as observed by different personnel at varied times and the same may profitably be utilised by future workers for detailed scientific investigations among the Totos" (Das:4).

In 1972 Santosh Kumar Bhattacharjee, the then Welfare Organiser of Totopara, published a small 50 page booklet about the Totos in Bengali, named Totoder Katha. The brochure was obviously designed to raise the awareness of the general public and also to popularise the Totos among the latter. Another Bengali booklet of a similar size as that of Bhattacharjee entitled Toto was prepared by Debendranath Dhali of the Cultural Research Institute in 1987. However the note prepared by Dhali belongs to the genre of research and contains some valuable information particularly about the land records that have been used liberally by the present author. Besides these A Comprehensive Five-Year

Plan for The Development of the Toto Tribes was prepared, compiled and edited by Sukumar Das, Addl. Deputy Commissioner, Jalpaiguri, and published by The District Welfare Committee for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Jalpaiguri, in 1982, in the form of a mimeograph. A fair idea about the developmental policies adopted towards the Totos can be obtained from the said publication.

#### 1.2 BACKGROUND AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The Totos are one of the four small and underdeveloped tribal communities of Indian mainland, the other three being the Kadar and Chola Naickans of Kerala, and the Rajis of Uttar Pradesh. The Totos live in Totopara, a small sub-Himalayan hamlet, situated on the Indo-Bhutan border under Madarihat Block of Jalpaiguri District in West Bengal. The present population of the Totos is about 926 persons, but the total population of the village is 2245 persons comprising another 9 communities who have settled there by squatting upon the land of the Totos.

The Mouza Totopara (J.L. 33, Old no. 13) is situated in isolation at the Indo-Bhutan border. The only link road with the Block headquarters Madarihat is Totopara-Ballalguri road. The road being in the hilly slopes is damaged by the rain water and number of rivulets flows through the area intercepting the road at several places and, therefore, in the rainy season, the road becomes inaccessible for the vehicles. Recently the road is being gradually

converted into a matalled road, which has been connected by a Bus service during the past three years. Tading is the nearest village lying inside Bhutan at a distance of about 3 kms. from Totopara. The distance of Lankapara Bazar is about 16 kms. and Funtsolling, the border town of Bhutan, is about 11 kms. on foot-track, through jungle and river beds. At present, there is a out-department Post Office in Totopara. Hasimara is the nearest Railway Station lying at a walking distance of 16 kms. from Totopara.

TABLE - 1.1  
INFRA-STRUCTURE AVAILABLE AT TOTOPARA

Description	Location and Remarks
<u>EDUCATION</u>	
1. Primary School	2 Pucca building, one at the centre of the village and one at Poargaon, constructed by the Lutheran World Service (L.W.S.) and Integrated Tribal Development Project (I.T.D.P.) respectively.
2. Junior High School	One Pucca building with Ashram Hostel, near the Primary School, established by the Lutheran World Service (L.W.S.).
3. Non-formal Education Centre	2 Centres within the village, but at present not functioning.
4. Anganwadi Centre	2 Centres within the village near the Tribal Welfare Centre, run by the D.S.B.
5. Rural Library	One Library near the Tribal Welfare Centre.
6. Adult Education Centre	6 such Centres located in different parts of the village, run by the Toto Kalyan Samity.

(contd.)

Description	Location and Remarks
<b><u>HEALTH CARE</u></b>	
7. Health Centre	One six bedded Public Health Centre has been completed near the Tribal Welfare Centre, but not yet inaugurated due to want of doctor.
8. Veterinary Centre	One insemination centre has been opened within the market, but not functioning regularly.
<b><u>FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS</u></b>	
9. Commercial Bank	One Branch of Uttarbangha Kshetriya Gramin Bank has been opened in the market and is functioning regularly.
10. Post Office	One Extra-Departmental Post Office opened at the Primary School building.
11. Co-operative	One Agricultural marketing Co-Operative Society has been formed near the market, but the progress is not satisfactory.
<b><u>OTHER FACILITIES</u></b>	
12. Drinking Water	Drinking water has been arranged by constructing tanks at the up-stream of rivers and by the laying of pipe lines down to the village, one Toto has been appointed for chlorinating the water. The maintenance of the pipe line is the duty of the villagers.
13. Electricity	The village is electrified by the Rural Electrification Corporation and a number of Toto houses are electrified although the supply is irregular.
14. Tribal Welfare Centre	Opened since 1951 in the southern part of the village and functioning regularly.
15. Religious Centre	The traditional Demsha house has been constructed by the Tribal Welfare Department.

(contd.)

Description	Location and Remarks
16. Club House	One Pucca house has been constructed by the Government for the <u>Poikimsha</u> of the Toto youths in heart of the village, but at present the house is occupied by a Toto family instead.
17. VDO Hall	One VDO hall run by a Behari businessman in a rented house in the market centre.
<u>COMMUNICATIONS</u>	
18. Railway Station	Hashimara is at a distance of 16 kms. and Madarihat Railway Station is at a distance of 21 kms.
19. Bus Stop	One bus regularly plies between Madarihat and Totopara during the fair weather, bus stops at the Primary School and the Market junction of Totopara which is the terminus.
20. Market Centres	<p>1. Lankapara is at a distance of 16 kms. and the <u>hat</u> takes place on Wednesday,</p> <p>2. Madarihat is at a distance of 21 kms. and the <u>hat</u> takes place on Sunday,</p> <p>3. Birpara is at a distance of 32 kms. and the <u>hat</u> takes place on Sunday,</p> <p>4. Apart from these there is a market centre right within the village where there are a number of regular shops and eating places, and the <u>hat</u> takes place on every Tuesday.</p>

#### SHOPS IN TOTOPARA BAZAR

- |                        |                               |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| i. Grocery             | 5 permanent shops.            |
| ii. Tailoring          | 2 permanent shops.            |
| iii. Tea stalls        | 4 permanent shops.            |
| iv. Textiles           | One permanent shop.           |
| v. Stationery          | 4 permanent shops.            |
| vi. Hotel              | 2 permanent shops.            |
| vii. Blacksmithy       | One permanent shop.           |
| viii. Vegetables       | 2 permanent shops.            |
| ix. Medicine           | 2 permanent shops.            |
| x. Home brew<br>liquor | 3 unlicensed permanent shops. |
| xi. Beef and<br>Mutton | 3 temporary shops.            |

(contd.)

Description	Location and Remarks
xii. Fish	2 temporary shops.
xiii. Milk collection centre	One centre run by HIMUL without any permanent structure for the purpose.

The Totos belong to the Mongoloid stock. They are of medium height with sturdy body and brown skin. They have straight hairs, with scanty beards and moustache. Their eye folds are epicanthic like that of the other Mongoloid people. For a long time the Government neither took the Totos into cognizance nor initiated any special measures for their upliftment. As mentioned earlier, the attention of the government was first drawn to them under a curious set of circumstances. It is only in 1955 that Roy Burman was sent as a Special Officer to help maintain peace in the strategic border village of Totopara in the northern frontier. Before this period the government had no occasion to intervene in the affairs of the Totos.

The first list for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes was prepared by the Government of India containing the names of 62 castes and 14 tribes based on the Government of India Act, 1935. The 1941 Census returns however enumerated a total number of 118 castes and 17 tribes, scheduled as well as un-scheduled. After the Independence of the country, it is found from official records that a total of 15 Presidential orders have been issued till 1984 for specifying the Scheduled Castes and

Scheduled Tribes in relation to various States and Union Territories under the provisions of Articles 341 and 342 of the Constitution of India. Each of these Orders were issued with several modifications, with the inclusion of more names in the subsequently modified Schedules. The first such Order was issued on 6 September 1950 as 'Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order 1950'. But the name of the Totos was not included in that Schedule. It is in this regard that Mitra wrote "Excluded from the President of India's list of seven scheduled tribes in West Bengal, the Toto suffers an anonymity which is wholly undeserved". The seven communities whose names were included as Scheduled Tribes in West Bengal were 1. Bhutia, 2. Lepcha, 3. Mech, 4. Mru, 5. Munda, 6. Oraon, and 7. Santal. Much afterwards the 'Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Lists (Modification) Order, 1956' was issued on 29 October 1956. The name of the Toto tribe is accommodated in this list for the first time. However their name was clubbed together in that list in one category as under : BHUTIA including Sherpa, Toto, Dukpa, Kagataj, Tibetan and Yolmo. After their inclusion as a Scheduled Tribe, the Totos have undoubtedly become qualified to receive special assistance from the government. But, at the same time, they continue to suffer from a certain anonymity even at present due to their grouping together with the Bhutias and others from whom they are otherwise sufficiently distinct. Also due to this unmindful categorisation, the Census reports no longer show the figures pertaining to the Totos separately since 1961.

During the preparation of the sub-Plan for the Tribal areas, the Government of India stressed the need of taking special care for the 'primitive and isolated tribal groups'. As per the definition agreed at the Delhi Workshop, the Birhors were identified as the 'primitive tribe' and the Totos were identified as the 'isolated tribe' in West Bengal. While preparing the Draft sub-Plan for the Tribal Areas of West Bengal the Government had already categorised the six tribal communities viz. Asur, Birhor, Sauria Paharia, Toto, Rabha and Lepcha as the underdeveloped tribes of West Bengal. The name of the Lodha or Kheria was included later on. Among these tribes, Asur and Sauria Paharia are not found in any area of this state in any sizeable number. Accordingly, the five remaining tribal communities viz. Birhor, Toto, Rabha, Lepcha and Lodha or Kheria were finally selected as the underdeveloped tribes of West Bengal, and special developmental programmes were taken up for the socio-economic upliftment of these tribal communities.

Thereafter, several subsequent lists were prepared by the Ministry of Home Affairs taking into account the primitive, isolated or underdeveloped condition of the Tribes. The Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, prepared such a list during the Seventh Five Year Plan (in December 1984) on the basis of the Report of the Working Group on Development of Tribes during the Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-90). It was mentioned in the report that most of them are small communities and would appear

that both in the past and present their growth rate has been abnormally low relative to the rest of the population. Referred to as the 'Lowest Layer' among the Scheduled Tribe communities by the Dhabar Commission, 1961, 72 Scheduled Tribe communities have been identified by the Ministry of Home Affairs on the basis of the low growth rate criterion and the following two additional criteria :

1. Pre-agricultural level of technology, and/or
2. Extremely low level of technology.

The following three Scheduled Tribe communities in West Bengal have been identified as the 'Primitive Tribes' according to the criteria mentioned above.

TABLE - 1.2  
PRIMITIVE TRIBES IN WEST BENGAL

Name of the Community	No. of Households (in 1984)
Birhor	120
Lodha or Kheria	9,123
Toto	135

Thus, the Government has identified the Totos as one of the three most underdeveloped Scheduled Tribes of West Bengal, and accordingly, has undertaken various measures for their protection and socio-economic upliftment. Some voluntary organisations have also implemented from time to time a number of developmental

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projects for such tribal people. At present agriculture is the main source of their livelihood. Some of the Totos have also been employed in different Government services in Totopara village itself.

Apart from public initiative, there are other factors like progressive contact with other communities that are at work. As a result, there are various changes that are taking place in the cultural and economic sphere of this small tribe. It will be the object of the present study to see how far and in what direction the Totos are being integrated both culturally and economically with the larger Indian society. The problems that arise in the process of such transformation will be highlighted so that necessary corrective measures may be undertaken by the planners and administrators.

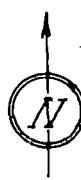
What needs to be emphasized is that even while the static and descriptive studies so far available have their relevance as bench-mark points, there is a definite scope and necessity to view the Totos in a dynamic perspective and examine the nature of transformation that is taking place due to the general march of modernisation and penetration of market economy. The social, cultural and economic changes that are overtaking the community, needs to be analysed in all their ramifications. It is against this background that the present study is being proposed.

At different stages of history, the Toto tribe has been moving away from a subsistence economy to market economy to sedentary shifting cultivation not always in keeping with the general march from one stage to another as is visualised by the economic historians. Further the transformation of the village from community ownership of land to individual land holdings and from mono-ethnic nature to a multi-ethnic habitat have also taken place in the recent past.

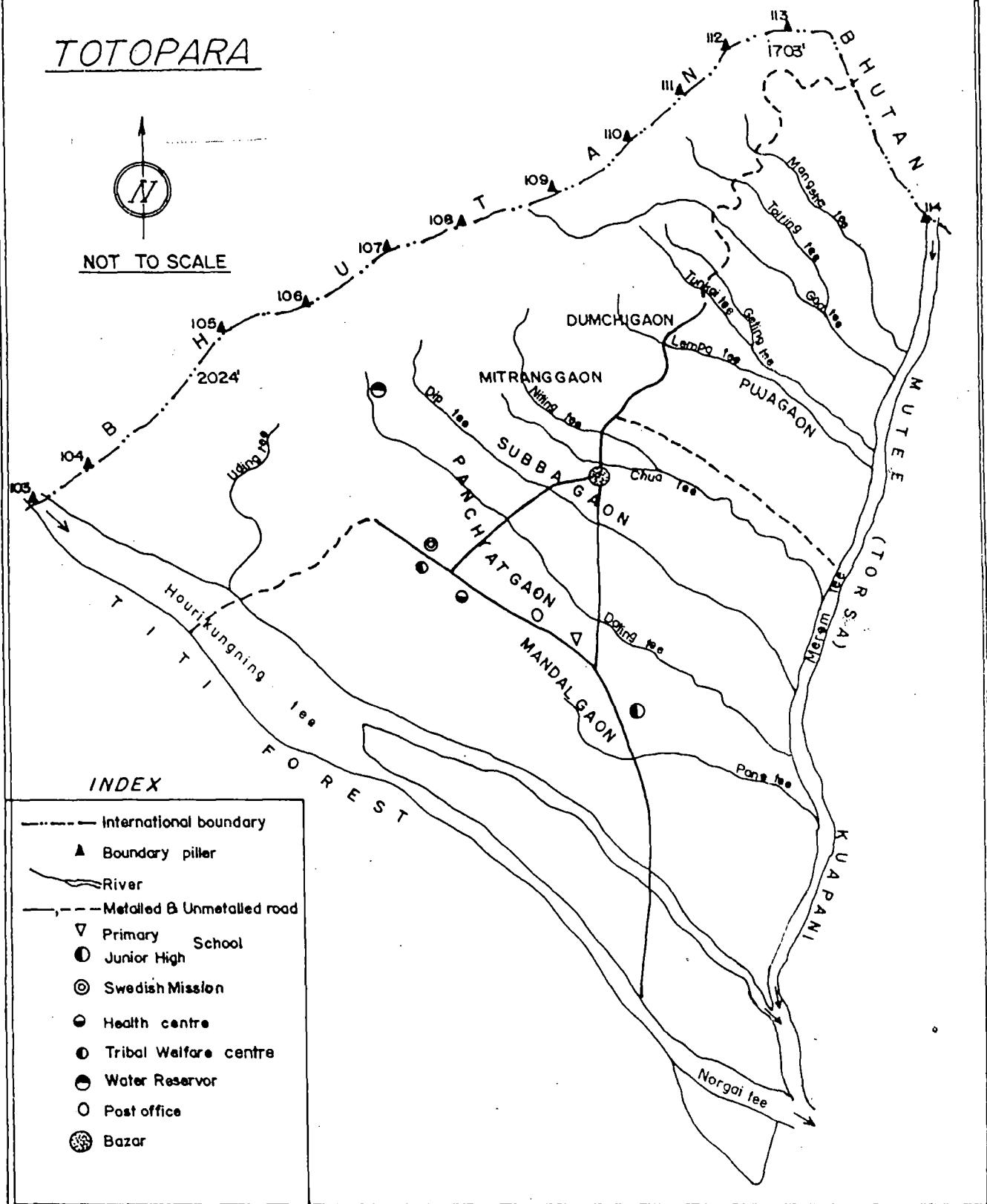
Till now the Totos have retained their own language, cultural heritage and social customs, which are now rapidly losing their values due to the increasing contact with other cultures. But owing to the sudden growth of population in Totopara, the Totos are now facing serious problems which pose a great threat to their cultural and economic existence.

As has been proposed, the present study is aimed at being a comprehensive account of the Totos in a very crucial period of their historical development. And even though the study is going to be primarily of a descriptive nature and only occasionally analytic, the guiding hypotheses at different stages have been that the economic individualism being thrust on a community from exogenous sources leads to disintegration at the tribal level, and further that economic integration with the larger market economy does not immediately lead to cultural integration of a small community in the larger social structure.

# TOTOPARA



NOT TO SCALE



## INDEX

- |       |                            |
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| ----- | International boundary     |
| ▲     | Boundary pillar            |
| —     | River                      |
| —, -  | Metalled & Unmetalled road |
| ▽     | Primary School             |
| ●     | Junior High                |
| ◎     | Swedish Mission            |
| ◆     | Health centre              |
| ●     | Tribal Welfare centre      |
| ●     | Water Reservoir            |
| ○     | Post office                |
| ●     | Bazar                      |

MAP NO. 2

### 1.3 THE GEO-PHYSICAL CONDITION OF THE VILLAGE TOTOPARA

Geographically the village of Totopara lies within Longitude  $89^{\circ}20'$  east and Latitude  $25^{\circ}50'$  north. The geographical area of the village is 1991.59 acres or 808.03 hectares (3.12 Sq. miles). The mouza is located under Madarihat Police Station of Alipurduar subdivision of Jalpaiguri district, in West Bengal. The shape of the village is trapezoid with tapering ends. The length of the village is 2.5 miles from north to south, while the east-west distance is about one mile, with a narrow end on the north and south-east corners.

The village is bounded in the north by the Tading hills, a nosebend east-west spur of the Bhutan Himalayas. The altitude of the village varies from 500 ft. to 2024 ft. from the south to north, up to the Indo-Bhutan border. On the south and west lies the river Houri-kungning-tee and the Titi forest. On the east the village is bounded by the river Merem-tee and Mu-tee (Torsha). The village lies on the southern slope of the crest line of the Tading hills.

The Toto localities of the village are sub-divided into six segments, 1. Panchayatgaon, 2. Mandalgaon, 3. Subbagaon, 4. Mitrang-gaon, 5. Pujagaon, and 6. Dumchigaon. The areas inhabited by the Nepalese are demarcated by Nepali names like Mongargaon, Puorgaon, Raigaon, Simadara etc. But, the whole area of the village, sub-divided into several segments, was once identified according to the original Toto names (Map no. 2).

The village Totopara, which is located on the southern watershed of the Tading hills, is intercepted by 12 streamlets. Most of these streamlets flow from Tading hills to river Merem-tee in the east and Houri-kungning-tee in the south-west. These streamlets are : (i) Mangshe-tee, (ii) Toiting-tee, (iii) Goa-tee, (iv) Tunka-tee, (v) Lempa-tee, (vi) Niting-tee, (vii) Chua-tee, (viii) Dip-tee, (ix) Dating-tee, (x) Pane-tee, and (xi) Uiding-tee.

TABLE - 1.3

## AVERAGE RAINFALL IN TOTOPARA AND SURROUNDING PLACES

Sl. No.	Name of the place	Period of observation	No. of Years	(in millimetres)	
				Average rainfall	Highest rainfall with year
1.	Totopara	1970-1979	10	4959	6444 (1970)
2.	Lankapara T.E.	1923-1952	30	4216	4919 (1951)
3.	Hantapara T.E.	1923-1952	30	3935	4666 (1951)
4.	Bandapani T.E.	1923-1952	30	3912	4747 (1952)
5.	Dalsingpara T.E.	1923-1952	30	3759	4777 (1938)
6.	Binnaguri T.E.	1941-1991	51	3759	5359 (1988)

Source : Tribal Welfare Centre, Totopara; Mr. P.K. Banerjee, Santri Manager, Binnaguri Tea Estate; District Census Hand-book, Jalpaiguri, 1951.

The Bhutan Himalayas play an important role in the climatic condition of Totopara, like the other foothill areas of

Duars. The average temperature of the village is  $17^{\circ}$  cc. The humidity of the village varies from 100% to 50%. The peculiarity of the village is that the dew drops do not form in the winter months during the night, which is a common feature in the other foothill region of Duars. But, the rainfall in Totopara is much higher than the other surrounding places. The average rainfall at Totopara is 4959 mm (Table - 1.3). The location of Lankapara Tea Estate is close to the Bhutan Himalayas and almost similar to that of Totopara, but it recorded an average rainfall of 4216 mm. only. Owing to the heavy rainfall Totopara suffers from large quantities of land erosion every rainy season, besides landslides. The heavy rainfall has also played an important role in the housing and cropping pattern. Owing to the effect of the heavy rainfall and depredation by wild animals, the Totos are used to construct their traditional houses on raised platforms like the other tribal communities of north-east India.

The topography of the village comprises of slopes and undulated valleys and meadows in most of the places, with an altitude ranging up to 2024 ft. from the sea level. Some of the areas cannot be used for agriculture because of its steepness. These spots were covered with sporadic forests and small bushes even two decades back. Most of these places have however been cleared up now for the extension of agriculture or homesteads by the squatters. As a result of indiscriminate deforestation over the past few decades the top soil of the village has almost been

washed away causing serious damage to the fertility of the soil.

According to the report of the Tochlai Research Station, the soil type of Hantapara Plateau, a contiguous area of Totopara, located just on the south-west side of it, are as given in Table - 1.4. The structure of the soil is single grained sand mixed with gravels. The colour of the soil is grey with loose texture. As the nature of the soil is porous and owing to the undulated nature of the topography of the land, it has no power to retain water thereby affecting the production of crops.

TABLE - 1.4  
SOIL TYPES OF HANTAPARA PLATEAU

Soil Ingredients	Per cent
Coarse Sand	25
Fine Sand	30
Silt	13
Fine Silt	17
Clay	11
PH of soil water Extract	5.6

Source : District Census Handbook, Jalpaiguri, 1961, p. 20.

There are several types of rocks and minerals in and around Totopara. Leads are found in some patches of Totopara interwoven with gravels and soil. Dolomite, Carbonate of lime, Calcareous tufa of high quantities are found in Titi river and

Torsha river. Calcarious tufa is also found in stalactite and stalagmite from in the upstream of Lankapara jhora close to Toto-para inside Titi forest. Besides, tertiary lime stone, and talc are found in the river beds of Torsha and Houri.

Till the fifties of this century the area was covered with lush green tropical forests, containing Maina, Simul, Gambhari, Sisu, Khair, Toon, etc. in the surrounding areas of Totopara, and also in the village itself. Various types of grass and shrubs and groves are also found as an undergrowth of the forests. Several types of yams including that of the tree-top varieties are also found in the forests. As an extension of Bhutan Himalayas, the area has a rich store of beautiful orchids and aril herbs. Creepers of various types are another notable species of vegetation of the area. One kind of wild coffee plants are found as an undergrowth in the forests, as is the case with many other areas of north Bengal. It blossoms with abundant white flowers in the month of January–February and bears a type of gree berries which ripen in the month of October–November. Besides, several types of common crops grow wild like red pepper, pipul, wild cinnamon, soapnut and more than fifty two types of leafy vegetables that are gathered by both the Totos and the Nepalese from the local forests.

Like the other parts of Duars, the surrounding forest areas of Totopara shares the same species of terrestrial, aquatic

and avion population. Gaur, elephants, sambhar, spotted deer, hog deer, barking deer, tiger, sloth bear, monkey, leopard and some other small animals were found in abundance in the surrounding forests till the fifties of this century. At present, most of these species have become extinct from the area owing to destruction of the ecological balance.

Now the area has become known as one of the dangerous places in the district for its herds of elephants whose depredation has become a regular feature. Every year crops of a large area and a good number of houses including human lives are damaged by the wild elephants.

Among the aquatic lives, there were different types of fishes, frogs, snails etc. in the river Torsha and its tributaries. At present, the population of fishes in the small tributaries are declining rapidly.

Python, viper, krait, king cobra, etc. are still found in Totopara and its surrounding areas. The lizards like iguana or blood suckers are also found there but squirrels are not found at all in the area.

In the past the area was famous for its avion population. Peacock and jungle fowls were found abundantly in the surrounding forests. At present, peacock, jungle fowls, swallow, bee-eater, owl, fishing eagle, imperial pigeon, green pigeon, common teal,

common crows etc. are sometimes encountered in and around Toto-para. Some endangered species like hornbill are of course rarely found in the area at present.

#### 1.4 METHOD OF ENQUIRY

For the purposes of the study on the cultural and economic transformation of the Totos, the data have been drawn from both secondary and primary sources. The author has gone through all available, and both published and unpublished, books, articles, notes, dissertation, official records and documents as secondary sources of data for the preparation of the present dissertation. However the principal such sources have been :

1. the Survey and Settlement Reports particularly by Sunder and Milligan, 2. a note on The Totos of Totopara by A. Mitra, 3. The Dynamics of Persistence and Change of a Small Community : The Totos by B.K. Roy Burman, 4. The Meches and the Totos by Charu-chandra Sanyal, 5. The Totos by Amal Kumar Das, 6. an article on Some Aspects of Toto Ethnography by P. Chakrabarti and K. Chatto-padhyay, and 7. the booklet Toto (in Bengali) by Debendranath Dhali.

Apart from these, data have also been collected from primary sources by on the spot surveys. The author has done much of his fieldwork on the Toto community since 1974 by paying visits to Totopara at least twice a year. It may not be out of place to

mention that such visits were undertaken for a long time as a labour of love and affection for the people rather than with an intention of submitting a dissertation for the award of a University degree. It should however be pointed out that the data collected through occasional visits to Totopara since 1974 have been supplemented by fresh surveys undertaken during the recent years after it was decided to submit a thesis for consideration by the University of North Bengal. It may therefore be pointed out that, under the circumstances, the positivistic paradigm was not followed consistently; rather, as will be seen from the subsequent pages, a critical approach has been favoured without, of course, meddling with any undue ideological pre-suppositions, or normative value judgements.

Since the size of population is very small and the Totos live in a single settlement, though their housing pattern is scattered, it has been possible for the author to cover all the households during his field survey. It is true that the ecology, economy and the ethnic habits of the village of Totopara are quite different from that of the other villages of rural Bengal. Also, the Totos are mostly illiterates, and some of them even now find it difficult to communicate in Bengali. But the author has never suffered from any disabilities in establishing a rapport with them and having a dialogue whenever necessary with the help of his mother tongue, Bengali, and working knowledge of both Nepali and Hindi. The task was made easier because of the long acquaintance of the author with the Totos since his first visit to the village

in 1974 to prepare an article at the behest of late Dr. Charu-chandra Sanyal, a renowned anthropologist of north Bengal. Gradually the author became fascinated with the Totos and decided to undertake the preparation for the first time of a Toto primer with a view to implementing adult education among them. It is thus that the first Toto primer Paderko-Zirewa was written by the author and was published by the Paschim Banga Niraksharata Durikaran Samity, Calcutta, in 1979. Thereafter a number of short notes and articles on the Toto language and culture were published by the author from time to time in various Bengali periodicals. A book entitled A Sociological Study of the Toto Folktales was also prepared by the author and published by the Asiatic Society, Calcutta, in 1991.

Needless to say that all the past experiences of the author have contributed to enrich the focal and subsidiary awareness of the author for the purpose of the present study. Also supplementary data were collected whenever necessary through ethno-methodological observations, interview with knowledgeable people, and canvassing of questionnaires. Much data were also collected from the Tribal Welfare Centre at Totopara and the Census reports.

During investigation it was found that the socio-economic and cultural environment of the village has grossly changed during the past four decades, especially after 1969, following the transformation of the community ownership to individual ownership of

land. The aboriginal inhabitants of the village i.e., the Totos have become outnumbered by the squatters, mainly the Nepalis, who have not only encroached upon the land of the Totos but also occupied the other fields of economic activities like orange trade from Bhutan to Totopara, forest gathering etc. The squatters now play a dominant role in both the statutory Panchayat system and day to day village politics. Apart from that, the Toto language and culture have also been overlapped by the Nepali language and culture. The village has also undergone many changes owing to the effect of modernisation and implementation of various developmental projects by both Government and other voluntary organisations. In this situation how far and in what direction the Totos are being transformed have been sought to be evaluated depending on the availability of data.

The accumulated information have been classified, analyzed, and presented systematically in the chapters as under : Demographic Transformation, Social Organisation, Economy and Livelihood, and Developmental Efforts and Cultural Adaptation, to be followed by a brief afterward containing in the main a discussion on the limitations of the present study and some suggestions for further research investigations.