

Educational Scenario among the Totos of Alipurduar District of West Bengal in post Independence Period.

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Introduction

The Totos are the smallest tribal group and one of the three primitive tribal communities of West Bengal. They are concentrated in the village of Totopara in Madarihat Police Station under Alipurduar district. The Totos belong to the Mongoloid racial stock. Geographically the Totapara village lies within longitude $89^{\circ}20'$ East and Latitude $25^{\circ}50'$ North. The altitude of the village varies from 500ft. to 2024 ft. from the south to north. The area is located in the extreme north-east region of Jalpaiguri district in western Duars bordering Bhutan. The shape of the village is trapezoid with tapering ends. The village is bounded in the north by the *Tading* hills, a spur of Bhutan Himalayas. On the south-west the village is bounded by the *Titi* forest and *Torsa* River to its east.¹

The village of the Totos is sub-divided into six distinct segments like *Panchayatgaon*, *Mandalgaon*, *Subbagaon*, *Mitrangaon*, *Dhumchigaon* and *Pujagaon*. These are Toto colonies which came into existence with the increase in their population. The whole area of the village sub-divided into several segments, was once identified according to the original Toto names.

Objectives

1. To inform about the history of how education spread among the Totos after independence and to highlight how much progress the Totos have made in the field of education in the present day i.e. how their condition is now in the field of education.
2. To specify the reasons behind the backwardness of Totos in the field of education.
3. To find out why Toto boys and girls do not progress in higher education or what causes them to drop out.
4. The present study aims to study the structural change in the education among Toto tribe.
5. To make some recommendations so that the Toto students are more interested in education, so that they don't drop out midway.

Methodology

I conducted field surveys in Totopara and interviewed specific Toto people. Primary data was collected on the basis of field survey. Besides, I collected many books as secondary sources and got a lot of information from there about Toto education. Besides, I got information from District Statistical Handbook and District Census Book. On the other hand, I have received valuable information from Backward Class Welfare Office, Alipur Duar which helped me a lot in this regard.

History of the spread of education among the Totos

Indeed sources on the educational development of the Totos before Independence are rare. It is not known whether the colonial government had taken any measure for the educational development of the Totos. C. C. Sanyal mentioned in his book *'The Meches and the Totos of North Bengal'* that "Many of the Totos could speak in broken Bengali. But literacy could not make any headway. No one was there to study their language and try to give them the first lesson in their own tongue. This would have given them an impetus to receive education".¹

In fact, different voluntary organizations and Government agencies have started working on the educational development of the Totos only after Independence particularly from 1951. A welfare centre was established at Totopara at that time known as '*Bharat Mahajati Mandali*'² under the initiative of the government. Attempts were being made to improve their participation in primary education alongside other developmental activities. At that time, *Jogen Sarkar* came to Totopara as welfare organizer. He also knew Nepali language. He taught the Totos students in Bengali language and Nepali students in Nepali at Totopara. But he could not work for long as he died in 1956. After his death, no teacher had joined there for a long time. Afterwards, *Dil Bahadur Rana* had been appointed there as assistant welfare organizer. But he could not succeed in teaching. He resigned from the service in 1954. As a result, education along with other development activities almost stopped. Later after *Dil Bahadur Rana*, many welfare organizers came to Totopara to work for their development. Among them were *Dr. Ashis Dutta*, *Bhagabanbabu*, *Mantosh Sarkar*, *Bangshibabu* and *Ruben Basumatari* to name a handful few. At that time, a primary school was established at Totopara for the improvement of primary education. The Adibasi Development Department also arranged for the spread of primary education among the Totos. A cooperative society was also established.³

Next came, *Santosh Bhattacharya* on 2nd January 1964 and *Gharma Prasad* on 15th July, 1965, as teacher cum assistant welfare organizer at Totopara. They were very conscious about their works and taught the Toto and Nepali students in Bengali language sincerely. But there was still no improvement in education among the Totos. In these context, *Santosh Bhattacharya* remarked that "*Parhaps there is no other tribal community in India which is as backward as the Totos in education. So far only 15-16 persons have learnt to put their signature during the past 20 to 21 years ever since efforts to spread education among them*

started in 1952 A.D.”⁴ In the 1950s *Dhanapati Toto* was pioneer in bringing of the Totos under the fold of education.

A Swedish Missionary Organization named ‘*Lutheren World Service*’ also worked for educational development among the Totos at Totopara. As a result, a new chapter was introduced thereafter in the spread of education among the Totos. They set up a work centre at Totopara in 1967 under the leadership of *Revarand Olav Hodne*. They took all activities after reviewing the overall life status of the Totos. *Narendranath Das*, Assistant Commissioner of Tribal Development Department of West Bengal and *Manindranath Mitra*, Special Officer of Tribal Development, Department of West Bengal were also actively involved with them in this initiative. With the approval of the Minister (Tribal Development Department of West Bengal), together they arranged for some (seven in number) Toto boys for vocational training in weaving loom, carpentry, agriculture and computer training at *Rampur Mission centre* in Coochbehar.⁵

In 1969-70 they built a school house named ‘*Toto Kalyan Vidyamandir*’ for teaching Toto students and *John Ekka* was appointed there as a teacher. But he left the school within a few days and *Anugraha Ekka* joined in his place. Teaching in both Bengali and English languages began from 1970. In addition to teaching, students were also served lunch in the school. As a result, interest in education gradually increased among the Totos. *Dr. Charu Chandra Sanyal* wrote in this context that “A big school house has been built where *Anugraha Ekka* an Oraon lady was the teacher and fifty five boys and girls were in roll. I saw many Totos who could speak Bengali well.”

Officially, this primary school was recognized by the District School Board in 1972. *Anugraha Ekka* joined this school as head teacher in 1973. But she was transferred to another place within a few days. *Haren Saiba* belonging to Mech tribe was then appointed as the Headmaster of the primary school in 1973. *Samuel Tigga*, an assistant teacher also joined there on the same year but he was also transferred from Totopara in 1974. *Parinita Mankhin*, a Garo lady teacher, was teaching there without pay since 1974 and later she was officially appointed as a teacher in this school in 1988. She was married to *Haren Saiba* and since then they have been teaching at the primary school.⁶

The statistics of the number of Toto students who were reading in primary school up to class IV between 1972 and 1991 is given underneath.

Year	Boys Student	Girls Student	Total
1972	35	1	36
1973	38	8	46
1974	34	6	40
1975	41	13	54
1976	39	12	51
1977	44	11	55
1978	41	10	51
1979	42	11	53
1980	58	14	72
1981	59	15	74
1982	51	15	66

1983	41	9	50
1984	39	5	44
1985	43	6	49
1986	43	14	57
1987	52	21	73
1988	56	19	75
1989	51	7	58
1990	50	15	65
1991	58	9	67
Total	915	221	1136

Source – Majumder, B, The Totos, 1998

The above table shows that 36 students studied at Toto Kalyan Bidyamandir in 1972 and among them there was only one girl student and the rest 35 were boys. Between 1972 and 1991 the number of Totos students had increased to 86 per cent. The table also shows that, the number of Totos students attending primary school was not satisfactory, compared to their total population. The ratio of enrolment of girl students in primary spell of learning in comparison to boys was even more deplorable. In 1972, percentage of girls' student among the Totos was almost 3 percent, whereas in 1991, 13 percent girl students were enrolled in the primary school. In 1991 the rate of receiving primary education among the Totos was 7 percent out of a total population of 926. The male participation in primary education was 12.7 percent out of the total male population of 473. The female participation, on the other hand was only 2 percent out of total female population of 453. So it is clear that earlier the rate of female education among the Totos was abysmally low in comparison to male students.

In 1991, one English Medium Nursery School was established by a Christian couple of Oraon origin in the house of Dhaniram Toto on rental basis. It was named as S.B.A. Mission English School in which only two girl students studied out of a total 28 students.⁷

In 1979, a Junior High School named Dhanapati Toto Memorial Junior High School was established at Totopara under the initiative of the *Swedish Mission*. The school is affiliated to the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education. In 1976–1980, the Swedish Mission established two Adult Education Centres at Totopara. But this effort of the Mission had failed due to the lack of awareness for education. In 1991, 57 students studied at Dhanapati Toto Memorial Junior High School. Out of them only 13 belonged to the Toto community and among them only thirteen were female students. It is necessary to mention here that at least 20 Totos students got secondary education outside Totopara under the initiative of the *Swedish Mission*. Out of 20 students, there were only three girls students. *Gouri Toto* studied upto class VI in 1978 by staying at the Dinhat Swedish Girls hostel. But *Bani Toto* studied at the Birsha High school upto class IX in 1979 residing at the house of *Rebati Mohan Sarkar* at *Chhoto Salkumar*. *Suchana Toto* studied initially at *Dinhata* but completed her study at Rangalibajna High school and studied upto class X in 1979 -80.⁸

In 1991, there were 13 Totos students studying in Dhanapati Toto Memorial High school. Among them there was only one female student. During 1992-93 only three female students took admission in class V and in the last three consecutive years their numbers in class V were 5 in 1993, 6 in 1994 and 10 in 1995. In comparison to boys, there was low participation of girls students in this school.

In 1993 the school was up-graded to high school, upto class X standard. After getting the affiliation of a High School some Totos students appeared in Madhyamik examination. Sri Chitta Ranjan Toto passed Madhyamik examination in 1979 after 32 years since Independence and he was the first Madhyamik qualified student in the Totos community. Sri Bhakta Toto was second student, who passed the Madhyamik examination in 1981 among the Totos.⁹

Educational Status of the Totos, 2001

	Illiterate	Literate								Total
		Read & Write	I-IV	V-VIII	IX	X	Madhyamik Passed	H.S. Passed	Graduate	
Male	406	17	100	73	13	4	1	1	1	210
Female	445	10	66	18	02	-	-	-	-	96
Total	851	27	166	91	15	4	1	1	1	306

Saha, Ishita - Educational Status of the Totos 2014, p. 102

It is found from the above table that the number of illiterate people among the Totos in 2001 were 851 and among them 406 were males and 445 females. In terms of percentage it was 35 per cent (males) and 38.6 per cent (females) respectively. In *Toto Kalyan Vidyamandir* the total number of students in 2001 was 166 and among them the percentage to Totos students were 14.34%. The above table also shows that the number of dropouts has increased gradually after the primary spell of learning. The total number of literate people in the school was 306 (26.4%) and among them the males were 210 (18.15%) and the females were 96 (8.29%).

Sanjib Toto earned the rare reputation of being the first graduate in 1998 among the Totos. *Dhananjoy Toto* was the only student among the Totos who achieved first post graduate degree from the University of North Bengal in 2016. *Sadhana Toto* was the first girl student who appeared in the Madhyamik examination, but she could not qualify. *Suchana Toto* is the first female candidate among the Totos, who passed Madhyamik examination in 2003 from Rastriyo Open School, known as Mcwilliam High School, located at Alipurduar. In the same year *Rita Toto* passed Madhyamik examination from Dhanapati Toto Memorial High School. *Rita Toto* was the first female graduate from the Totos who passed out from P.D. Womens' College, Jalpaiguri in 2010. *Sanchita Toto* was the first female Hons. graduate among the Totos, who passed out in 2013.¹⁰

Education among the Totos has been expanding slowly with the passage of time. At present there are one high school and two primary schools at Totopara. Hostel facilities are available there for the students. Around 20 boys and 20 girls' pursue their studies staying at the hostel. There was also an English medium primary school at Totopara built under private initiative. Totos students now study at different places, such as, Kolkata, Darjeeling, Madarihat and other places also.¹¹ It shows their awareness for education in recent times.

Until 2016, 139 Toto students have passed Madhyamik examination and their numbers in Higher Secondary Examination, as well as in higher spells of learning like graduation and post graduation were 59, 11 and 01 respectively.

The Social Education Department, Government of West Bengal had organized five non-formal education centres at Totopara during 1989-1990. *Smt. Banani Ghosh, Dhaniram Toto, Sachin Toto, Smt. Bani Toto* and *Smt. Suchana Toto* were entrusted with the responsibility of managing these centres. However, after some years these centres were shut down on account of financial crunch.¹²

Though Totos are educationally conscious today, there is no significant progress in the field of higher education. Economic crisis is the main reason for this. The government has provided substantial financial assistance for the promotion of their higher education but to no avail. The reasons are not hard to seek.

It is observed that the spread of education is not same in all the localities of the Totopara. *Panchayetgaon* and *Subbagaon* are ahead from the other villages like *Pujagaon, Dumchigaonin* and *Mitrangaon* in terms of education. *Panchayetgaon* and *Subbagaon* have the advantage of location. These villages are well connected by motorable roads and Government officials and others are more visited this areas. The Tribal Welfare Centre, different project Head quarters and market are within these areas. It is found that there was no female literate among the Totos in *Mitrang-gaon, Puja gaon* and *Dumchigaon* till 1979. Even in 1991 the situation was miserable.

Literacy Rate among the Totos at the Totopara under Alipurduar District

Educational Status among the Totos 2019

Age Group	Illiterate			Literate														
				Up to IV			V - X			H.S			Graduate			Post Graduate		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
61 - 65	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
56 - 60	2	0	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
51 - 55	2	2	4	2	0	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
46 - 50	2	4	6	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
41 - 45	9	6	15	4	1	5	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
36 - 40	3	12	15	5	3	8	4	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
31 - 35	3	4	7	5	3	8	2	1	3	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	1
26 - 30	3	9	19	14	17	31	1	5	6	6	1	7	2	0	2	0	0	0
21 - 25	0	3	3	3	8	11	4	3	7	7	5	12	5	1	6	0	0	0
16 to 20	0	0	0	3	4	7	12	14	26	6	2	8	0	0	0	0	0	0
11 to 15	0	0	0	17	9	26	3	5	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
6 to 10	0	0	0	20	12	32	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Up to 5	8	11	19	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	33	51	84	76	57	133	29	28	57	19	8	27	8	1	9	1	0	1
Percentage	10.61	16.39	27	24.4	18.36	42.76	9.32	9	18.32	6.11	2.57	8.68	2.57	0.32	2.89	0.32	0	0.32

Source - Field Survey, 2019

Total 311 sample data has been collected from people by the author from *Pujagaon, Dhumchigaon, Mitranggaon, Mandalgaon, Panchayatgaon, Subbagaon* villages at Totopar in 2019. From the above table, it is shown that out of 311 Totos, 84 are illiterate (33 male and 51 female). Percentage of illiterate people is 27% (10.61% male and 16.39% female).

On the other hand, 133 number of literate people who had their education up to class IV (male is 76 and female is 57). The percentage of these people who had not crossed up to class IV (primary level) is 42% (male 24.4% and female 18.36%).

Literate persons having secondary level education (class V to X) is 57 (male 29 and female 28). Their percentage is 18.33% of 311 (male 9.33% and female 9%).

Literate persons who have completed Higher Secondary level is 27 (male 19 and female 8). Percentage thereby being in H.S level is 8.68% (male 6.10% and female 2.57%).

We see from the above table that literate person in graduate level is 9, male 8 and female 1. Literacy percentage in graduate level is 2.89% (Male 2.57% and female 0.32%). Literacy percentage in post graduate level is 0.32%.

From the above table, we can say that the literacy rate at the primary level is roughly satisfactory, but the number of drop out students at higher spells of learning is really alarming. The main cause behind this drop out is nothing but abject poverty. During the field survey, the author came to know that, boys and girls accompanied their parents for subsistence of the family. It is not possible for parents to bear the cost of studies of their children due to poverty. The main task of the boys and girls is to earn money for survival rather than going to school. The socio-economic condition of people at Totopara is not conducive enough to imbibe education.

Obstacles of Totos in education

In the current situation, the Totos are interested in education, but due to various obstacles, no progress has been made in the field of education among the Totos. The main reason is economic poverty. On the other hand, the pressure of Nepalese immigrants is one of the important reasons for the backwardness of the Totos. Even though the Totos were once isolated, they were self-reliant. Since the fifties of the twentieth century, the land and livelihood of the Totos have been under pressure due to the continuous pressure of Nepali immigrants.¹³

Apart from economic poverty, another reason is lack of awareness about the benefits and importance of education. Due to pressure of work children especially girls are forced to stay at home and parents also want their children to join them to earn money. Apart from this, there is a lack of infrastructural facilities in the field of education. However, it can be said that Swedish missionaries and West Bengal government have played an important role in the development of Toto education through the establishment of primary and secondary schools in Totopara.

Totos are losing interest in education day by day, because all the Toto boys and girls who have been educated in higher education have not yet got government jobs. This is having a negative impact on the younger generation. Naturally, they are dropping out of school and participating in various activities due to poverty. It is important to provide vocational training to the younger generation of Totos for employment. But there is no such facility in Totopara. Another problem is that there is no higher secondary school in the area. Students, both boys and girls find it very difficult to access to education after passing secondary education. Due to the poor communication system, it is very difficult for the girls to travel every day to Madarihat, for study. In the rainy season the situation becomes even worse.¹⁴

In an exclusive interview with Dhaniram Toto, dated 18th October, 2019, it is known that the Totos are now more interested in education due to the urgency of the situation. He said the Totos must be educated more and more to sustain their existence. Totos should move towards science mentality. Day by day the number of Toto educated unemployed is increasing so separate reservation system and vocational training should be done for Toto in government jobs. Then the interest of the students towards education will increase and the drop out rate will also decrease.

Suggestions on the education of Totos

It is already known that the literacy rate among the Totos was extremely low which makes their education system seriously inadequate. It is not working as the government wants. Therefore, the following policy questions and suggestions can be considered.

Toto needs professional staff to improve education. It is not just a matter of more teachers, but of more qualified and more caring teachers. If unemployed educated youth can be employed as teachers in local schools, then the interest and enthusiasm among Toto students towards education will increase a lot.

The inflation of official statistics on registered students is another problem that needs to be addressed. What is needed is a system that actually provides incentives to tribal parents to enroll their children in school and persuade children to continue there. Poor families used temporary assistance to compensate their children's labor losses.

More education needs to be made more relevant from a tribal perspective. The introduction of comprehensible materials education for tribal children should be given priority. If they are not yet available, textbook promotion projects should be launched. Teachers should have some familiarity with the tribal lifestyle. The importance of education followed through job training and job placement can go a long way in persuading Toto.

More importance should be given on vocational education. Toto students can earn some money by taking vocational education after secondary level education. In this way the latent talents of many students will be explore.

In addition to learning, Toto students should give importance to co-curricular activities (sports, handicrafts, study tours etc.). It will help in increasing the focus on education among the Toto students.

Nevertheless, it may be necessary to challenge Toto's conventional practices and persuade them to adopt new ideas. It is clear that special attention needs to be paid to the role of women and children in Toto society. They should learn that women can also have productive and rewarding jobs elsewhere.

It is very important to have a school at least up to 12 classes in the nearest distance so that the students do not have any difficulty in getting education. It is not possible for them to reach a school in the neighboring district, for which there is no regular transport. Interested students need to arrange hostels or ensure regular reliable transportation to continue their education.

Conclusion

Education is an important means by which individuals and societies can develop their own talents, personal resources, build capacity levels and expand opportunities for the elimination of barriers and sustainable development in their well-being. The purpose of tribal education in this context is to find a balance between the preservation of the cultural identity of the tribe and the mainstreaming of economic prosperity. An educational program must be adopted to ensure the success of the Toto children in mainstream schools and the inclusion of the Totos in the mainstream of society like other communities. Only education can uplift the society and bring success and progress in the lives of Totos by removing their own obstacles.

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