



Environmental Degradation and the Issues of Survival: A Study on a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group of Eastern Himalayan Region, India

Somenath B*, Goswamy N and Banerjee S

Department of Anthropology, Nagaland University, India

*Corresponding author: Somenath Bhattacharjee, Department of Anthropology, Nagaland University, Nagaland, India, Tel: 8777796831; Email: somenath@nagalanduniversity.ac.in

Review Article

Volume 7 Issue 2

Received Date: August 12, 2024

Published Date: September 19, 2024

DOI: 10.23880/aeoj-16000250

Abstract

In the context of civilization advanced communities are enjoying a higher living of standard by using of more sophisticated technology, health facilities, well educational infrastructure settled economy, proper communication and also with other amenities. The Totos are a little known Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG), dwelling in the extreme northern part of West Bengal. It is the Indo-Bhutan border area of the eastern Himalayan region. They practice settled cultivation with a very low rate of production of maize, marua, cown etc. A very few of them also practice paddy cultivation on the hill slopes of their small plots of lands. They collect different types of fruits, roots, tubers, medicinal plants and other daily necessities from the nearest forest/jungle. They also graze their domestic animals on that forest. Many of them were earlier depended on Bhutan for their livelihood. At present, due to deforestation, land alienation, socio-economic marginalization, practice of primitive type of technology, poor communication, national boundaries etc, highly affected their socio-cultural, economic and political life. Particularly these issues have been discussed in this paper and efforts are being made to find out the main causes of obstacles towards their development and survival.

Keywords: Vulnerable; Land; Environment; Survival; Crisis

Abbreviations

PVTG: Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group; PCS: Preliminary Census Schedule; TSP: Tribal Sub Plan; GP: Gram Panchayat.

Introduction

The existence of human life is enmeshed with their surrounding environment. The well adaptable and well suitable environment is the prime source for the fulfillment of all of their basic needs. Actually, the concept of environment

and ecology gives us a multidimensional approach. Ecology is the surrounding living and nonliving environment in which a man lives. So, ecology, environment and man are related both structurally and functionally. Anthropology being the wholistic study of man observes him from social, cultural, physical as well as psychological point of view. Ecology and environment is related with all of his activities to deal daily livelihood and control his mode of behaviour. The environment is the prime source which provides the basic need of human being. The degradation of ecological and environmental balance and its impact on general population

is now a global feature. In this context, India is also facing some sort of problem. Presently India is a country of more than 114 crore of population; in this total population feature 8.08 percent people belongs to tribal population [1]. In India officially total 22 percent land belongs to forest area. More or less forest is directly and indirectly related with our social, cultural and economic life. It is more prominently observed among the tribals. On the basis of forest and forest related products the tribal life is maintained in every aspect. They take their shelter under big trees; they take their food, tuber, fruit and honey from the forest to maintain their nutritional requirement; they collect various herbal plants and roots for their medicinal purpose; they use bamboo leaves to build their hut; they made bamboo and straw based crafts to earn a little bit.; they graze their cattle in their adjacent forest. Thus the importance of forest is present in each and every sector of the tribal life. So, if the surrounding ecological background is changed then it will surely have a great impact on the adjacent population [2].

Some of the Tribes in India are still now depending on hunting, gathering with primitive mode of technology and pre agricultural stages with lack of modern agricultural knowledge [3]. Economic hardship is a common phenomenon in their livelihood and they hold a comparatively lower economic status. These features are highly observed in Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG). The criteria adopted for identification of such PVTG's are pre agricultural stages with primitive technology, low level of literacy and poor numerical strength. According to the Ministry of Home Affairs the following criteria's have been accepted for the identification of such groups.

- The population growth rate is very low compared to the rest of the population. Therefore they exist in small communities.
- The level of technological development is in pre agricultural stage.
- The level of literacy is extremely low and it is lagging far behind from the average Tribals. There is practically little or no progress of literacy among such groups.

At the end of the 5th, 6th and 7th five year plans the PTGs' were 52, 72 and 74 respectively in number. Sahu (1998) stated that now there are 75 PTGs' in India. At present in West Bengal there are three PVTGs and the Toto is one of them. They are residing in Totopara in the Madarihat subdivision of Jalpaiguri district. From a prolonged period, they are the inhabitants of 'Totopara', of Jalpaiguri district in West Bengal [4]. It is a location on the lap of Eastern Himalayan region. In the last couple of decades noticeable environmental degradation has taken place in their territory and it has made a serious impact on their daily livelihood [2]. Analysis has been done through data collected during fieldwork from

April 2024 to July 2024 by comparing the traditional and modern livelihood of the Totos, keeping in mind the situation of environmental degradation.

Objectives

The major objective of the present study is:-

- To know about the traditional social structure, social organization and cultural practices of the studied people.
- To understand the traditional economic organization of the studied people.
- To find out the impact of environmental degradation and its impact on their socio-economic condition and socio-cultural aspects in the contemporary period.

Methodology

The present study is based on primary data collected through empirical field work in the Totopara sub division of Jalpaiguri district West Bengal. The field work was conducted from April 2024 to July 2024. There were total 253 Toto families and the total population was 1268. Among them there were 671 male and 597 female and the sex ratio was 890. Total sampling method has been applied. There were three divisions of the total field work.

Division 1: Foremostly, the general observation of the village was done along with the completion of Preliminary Census Schedule (PCS) to know the demographic composition of the studied people.

Division 2: Case studies were taken on the concerned families. It was focused on the issues of their historical background, traditional occupational pursuit, present economic pursuit, indigenous knowledge of traditional health care practices, magico-religious healing practices.

Division 3: Detailed open structured interviews were taken from the key informant, eldest person of the settlement, leader of the traditional political organization of the concerned society, administrative authority related with the studied settlement. It focused to assess the impact of environmental degradation on their socio-economic and socio-cultural life in the contemporary period.

Brief Discussion about the Totos

Habitation and Population Structure

The Totos are designated as one of the six underdeveloped tribes of West Bengal, residing in the cross roads of Indo Bhutan border. At present, they live in a small hill area at the foot hills of the Himalayas just to the south of the borderline between Bhutan and West Bengal named "Toto Para" village of Madarihat police station, Jalpaiguri district in West Bengal and it lays to the Tading Hills of Bhutan. The northern end

of the village Totopara emerged with Bhutan; on the south and west are dense Titi Reserve Forest; on the east turbulent river Torsha. They are living in the present locality since the middle of the 18th century [5]. Afterwards they moved to this area from western Dooars because of fatal diseases like kalazar, malaria and to avoid unfriendly and powerful Bhutias. Previously the place of their residence was under the control of Bhutias, but from 1968 they came under the domination of British. The whole area of the mouza comprised 3.12 square miles was recorded in the name of Toto Mandal. Till 1982 the village was completely isolated from the main habitation [6].

Occupational Feature

Previously the Totos were totally depending on Jhum cultivation, domestication and food gathering from forest. When the province was under the control of Bhutias, they were engaged in carrying rice, salt from the market of the Indian plain to Bhutan. On their return journey they used to bring orange and various jungle products from Bhutan, which they used to sell among the people of the plains. During field study it has been reported that the studied people were primarily engaged in settled cultivation.

At present agriculture is the main subsistence of the Totos, and still now they almost followed the primitive type of agriculture. Cultivation of kaoni and Toto marua, maize, and Nepali marua, pulses, tapioca, green vegetable, ginger, areca nut are practiced by almost all the Toto families. Very recent some of them are engaged to practice in paddy cultivation. They do not sell their crop; mainly they produce it for their own consumption. Meanwhile, besides all these facts, till now they are unable to acquire proper knowledge regarding agriculture.

In the past (up to 1930s), orange was a chief economy of this area. They often used to go to 'ANGDAITA' or trade tour [5]. But with the changing dimension of time these factors were totally abolished. The produced grain can meet with requirements for about 7-8 months and the rest period the people are in search of other occupational outfit. Presently, 107 (42.29%), 24 (9.49%), and 122 (48.22%) families are engaged in various works in India, Bhutan and both India-Bhutan respectively. Women are too engaged in physical labour for household purposes. They have a unique community labour sentiment. The Totos are very fond of animal husbandry. They use to rear pig, hen, goat, cow, and ox. These animals are also important from their socio religious point of view.

Food and Drinks

They have an enjoyment to catch fishes from river Torsha during rainy season. Meat is more frequently taken.

Meat of cow, buffalo, pigeon, pig, fowl etc., is all taken except of dog, cat etc. They do not use spices to cook the meat, but they take it by boiling and with a bit of salt and chilly. They have a habit to collect and eat the meat of snails. Dried meat is also a very favourite item. The members sit together and eat their means. They took their meals twice a day. During dinner they took light food like boiled tapioca, fried maize and Eu (Homemade liquor). Betel nut and leaf are preferred by both male and female.

Material Culture and House Type

The Totos have very little utensils for their personal belonging. Their main utensils are very simple. They have wooden bowls, iron pans, enamel plate, liquor bucket, and clay made pitchers etc. They lie on straw mattresses and gunny bag. Recently they have started to use mattresses. Traditional Toto dress appears to be of prototype of Bhutia dress. Mainly aged men wear a piece of small cloth round their waist and another piece of cloth crosswise to their necks. A rapid change of dress pattern is seen in present generation. Among their ornaments traditional coin made necklace is no more. At present mainly the women have become interested to use the cheap and glamorous imitations which they purchased from the market [6].

The traditional Toto house is called Nakosa built on wooden or bamboo poles about four to six feet above the ground. Roof is generally thatched with grass. Floor and walls are of split bamboos. But now people are more accepting modern house pattern as provided by Government through TSP and GP level. Each of their huts has generally one room with 12-15 ft length and 8-10 ft breadth.

Educational Status

Until 1960 the Totos were totally devoid of education. But now they are steeping towards a new dimension of education. Present study reveals that 46.78(508) percent Totos are literate where males are 65.94(335) percent and females are 34.06(173) percent. At present the total school going children are 306 (18.18%) where boys are 191 (62.42%) and girls are 115 (37.58%).

Social Organization

Clan system plays a very important role in Toto society. Basically the Totos are an endogamous group and they have 15 exogamous clan (Field Study, 2024). These clan members are settled at 6 different hamlet of the village. All the clans have their own kuldev or ancestor but the present generation has almost forgotten them. After marriage a couple is treated as a separate family unit. But they also live in joint family having their own establishment. Most of the

families are of monogamous type. Polyandry is prohibited among the Totos. Widow Remarriage is permissible. Cross cousin marriage is prevailed but parallel cousin marriage is completely prohibited among them. Senior sororate is not allowed but junior levirate is permitted. Earlier there were no practice of dowry, but now in 7.12 percent cases marriage payment has been taken (Field Study, 2024). Till now the age of marriage starts from 12 years for girl and 15 year for boys. It has been reported that 87.35(221) percent families are of nuclear type, 11.07(28) percent and 1.58(4) percent are of joint and extended type of family respectively; and they have an average 5 family members (Field Study, 2024). Most of the delivery cases (76.80%) took place in their houses in presence of untrained dhais (midwives). The newborn baby inherits the clan of their father. Traditionally the Toto society has two village organizations; the religious organization is controlled by the kaiji. He is the senior priest or the chief priest, and to assist the kaiji there are several priest known as Pau; and the headman Mandal is the head of the secular administration. Both posts are hereditary. Kaiji settles social and religious disputes and bestowed with the power to expel any taboo breaker from the society. He does it with the help of village elders. Mandal settles disputes regarding land, crop, cattle, and domestic problem. But now this system is changing rapidly and the administration is under the control of statutory panchayet of political parties. The Totopara Ballalguri panchayet samiti is formed of 9 members among whom there are only 2 representatives from Toto society (Field Study, 2024). During field study it has been reported that there is no practice to get share of parent's property to the married daughter and only son can achieve it. There is no restriction to give the fathers property to their daughter on demand. But usually it is not practiced. But females are treated with distinct respect in Toto society. The Totos believe that death took place due to diseases caused by malevolent spirits. They bury the dead bodies in their respective clan ossuary located towards east of the village. Death ritual is observed on 6th day in case of male and on 5th day in case of female. Though mourning was observed for 12 months in the past. But by recent decision taken by the village elders, it is now observed only for 12 days. After observing mourning for this period the husband or the wife is allowed to continue his or her normal life and can remarry a new person.

Religious Practices

The Totos are basically animistic. They are the worshipper of sky, hill, forest, river, sun, moon, stars and all the "Terrance elements". They have two major religious festival viz. Mayu and Ongchu. Their daily activities of life are related with many ritual gestures. The chief deities of the Totos are Ispha or Mahakal. It is represented by two drums called as Bakung. One drum is represented as female (east) and another is male (west) and they are kept hang from

the ceiling of the temple. Community religious festivals are observed in the house where the drums are kept. Their chief priest is called as Pau who plays an influential role regarding religious matters.

Impact of Environmental Degradation on the Totos

Forest and natural environment has become a common issue in India basically for three reasons- firstly, from ecological point of view; secondly, from commercial value; thirdly, due to growing unrest centering forest and exploitation of natural resources. Forest and environment are enmeshed with the daily existence of the tribals. In the lap of nature tribal culture can find the rhythm of survival and their cultural traits are nourished by nature. The tribal communities primarily depend on minor forest produces for their subsistence. Besides, the forest dweller, forest is the prime subsistence for a majority of tribal population. They totally depend on wild fruits, timbers, leaves, wild animals and birds as their prime source of food during lean months of the year. Besides agricultural work, handicraft is another important occupational outfit for the tribals. Raw materials required for handicraft works are mostly collected from the forest directly or indirectly. Collection of honey and latex as well as other non-timber forest produces are very important income sources from tribal economical point of view. Forest is the prime source for the collection of fuel. Besides cooking they sell the firewood in the markets and earn a little bit. The socio cultural life of the tribals is intimately connected and correlated with the forest ecological circumference. Directly and indirectly in the tribal mind forest symbolizes the manifestation of totemic objects, worshiping idols etc. They also have a common faith that their ancestry is closely related with plants in the forests. Health and nutrition particularly in tribal societies are intimately connected with forest. It has been reported that the tribals who are living in remote areas have a better health status and more balanced food than those living in less remote and depleted forest areas [5]. Even the medicinal plants and herbs used by them are becoming a prime source of the modern medicine. Health and treatment among the tribals particularly the forest dwellers are also very much connected with the environment and forest ecology. So, truly, "tribals can in fact be regarded as children of forest" [3]. The whole social, cultural and economic lives of the tribals are totally interrelated with the forest and concerned environmental background.

Forest helps to maintain a balanced ecosystem in nature and provide sufficient food to the people, depending on it. So, any type of degradation in the forest environment and ecological setup is likely to affect the whole balance, thereby adversely affecting the concerned population. Thus, environmental degradation can cause a rapid change to the

socio-cultural, socio-economic as well as socio-religious life of any tribal community wherever concerned in the world. Officially the forests in India cover an area of 7,43,584 square km. Or 22 percent of the total geographical area of India, although actual forests cover in 1997 is 63.34 million hector or 19 percent of total land area. Between 1951 to 1980 India has lost 4.3 million hector of forestland, which means 1,40,000 hector annually and it was diverted to non-forest uses. According to recent official estimates the real forest are of India does not exceed more than 13 percent of its total land [6]. Total area of West Bengal is 88,752 sq. km. At present in West Bengal there is only 13.38 percent reserved forest area and in North Bengal it is 14.13 percent. The Totos residing in the Jalpaiguri district covers 28.75 percent forest of its

entire territory. The phenomenon of deforestation is also very common in West Bengal. Thus, the residence of Totos is not an exceptional from this general trend. Naturally, these factors certainly have made a serious impact on their overall livelihood. All the consequences in their daily life regarding environmental and ecological degradation are discussed one after another.

In the year 2024 the world population was 8.20 billion. The United Nations predicted that during 2050 the world population will rise up to 10.7 billion. Thus there will be an increase of 78 million per year. In India the population is increasing by leaps and bounds too. The following table is giving more details.

| Country/State/District | Total Population in 2011 | Decadal Growth (2001-2011) | Density of Population (2011) |
|------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| India | 1,027,015,247 | 21.34 | 324 |
| West Bengal | 80,221,171 | 17.84 | 904 |
| Jalpaiguri | 3,403,204 | 21.52 | 547 |

Table 1: Increase of Population in India.

Source: Census, 2011

The scenario of rapid population explosion people gradually started to migrate from place to place to search the amenities for livelihood. Thus their concept of territory and locality has expanded from regional to universal dimension. The migration of people has affected a lot to the isolated tribal regions. The Totos residing at 'TotoPara' are also facing similar problem. For the fulfillment of basic needs in livelihood people both from nearer and distant province gradually came into Totopara and started to live a permanent life. As a result the land pressure gradually increased day by day. The land and the authority of the Totos were mostly shifted into the grip of new comers. According to official estimate (2024), there were 260 Toto families, 700 Nepali families, 25 Bihari families, 4 families of Bengali and Muslim and 2 families of Garo and Mech. Thus the Totos have become minority in their own village as they constitute only 25.08 percent (1227) to the total population in 2024. As the control over land started to get loose, simultaneously their right over natural resources also started to degenerate. The new comers started to exploit natural resources in their own means. This exploitation was for their own demand and more than that their profit motive and commercialized mind. The continuous exploitation of natural resources gradually resulted an acute environmental degradation and non-sustainable ecological infrastructure. The Totos, who were closely related with nature and environment for their existence suffered a major setback. Till now they are continuously struggling to lead their livelihood by facing problems in every aspect.

Due to rapid deforestation, soil erosion gradually started to increase in Totopara. So the hardness of soil naturally became degenerated in its own way. With the consequence of continuous deforestation and soil erosion the hydrological balance also disturbed very much. Previously during rainy season and more or less throughout the year a good number of streams flowed down through many directions in Totopara. The water from those streams fulfilled the daily requirement of the people both drinking and purpose of household activity. The Totos caught a number of fishes and mollusks (snails) from those streams and it supplied the secondary source of their requirement of animal protein. But as those streams are no more so they are now unable to fulfill their demand of nutritional requirement. The Totopara is at a distant locality from the urban metropolis and the way to reach the place is a hazardous one. Especially during rainy season, the pebble covered and mud evacuated road makes utter difficulty for the urban centres to communicate regularly with them. The soil erosion, frequent minor landslide and over flooded water of the streams prevent the people to go there with heavy vehicles. So, the Totos have to remain in complete isolation more or less throughout the year. Lack of communication is leading to a lack of interaction with civilized society and this is resulting their devoidence from basic amenities. They are in the unawareness from scientific means of livelihood, modern enlightenment of education and advanced medical facilities. Thus, due to environmental degradation and disturbances in ecological balance the Totos are facing an acute social backwardness.

The gradual migration of people from the other areas caused an acute crisis for the Totos. Presently there are only 25.08 percent families are of the Totos in Totopara. Previously this indigenous people utilized their natural resources from their growing demand and with under control. But with the advent of civilized society in the Totopara the share over natural resources shifted jointly. The Totos gradually started to loss their control over natural resources. The population of the region was on the way of increase both due to natural growth of the Totos and the huge influx of migrated population. As a result, the land pressure started to gradually increase in Totopara. Due to the fact, that the Totos continuously lost their authority over their own land, it leads their land to alienate under the control of new comers. So the Totos became both landless and resource less within their own territory. According to 1961 census Hand Book, Totopara mouza had 1996.76 acres land. Since 1969 the greater portion of land was vested due to unknown reason. 'Bangalok' (13th March'1996) highlighted that now the Totos have only 343 acres land [6], and our present field study also support the same. Their continuous loss of economical pursuits and loss of basic resources for livelihood made them unable to lead that very simpler life once they did. To make fulfill their common minimum necessities they slowly got enmeshed in the web of indebtedness. Both their need and lack of knowledge made it a serious problem for them. The moneylenders give them money under various terms and conditions, which is commonly called as thika system. The simple-minded Totos were unable to understand those complexities and clever motives; as a result they completely lost their personal belongings.

At present, total 88 (34.78%) families were compelled to take public loan. They took it mainly for their familial purposes as well as extreme poverty and also for engagement in new means of earning for betterment of their livelihood. But it is worthy to mention that they were completely getting exploited. Besides these progresses they were even now acutely facing some problems in their socio-cultural life as well as maintaining their minimum way of living. Thus mostly they were unable to cope up with civilized society. Among the Totos 56.38 percent people suffered from many serious diseases. The moist and rainy environment is more or less prevailed throughout the year in Totopara. They are lagely devoid of basic amenities in their life. As a result they have to suffer from a number of diseases. Moreover, the people are not provided with daily requirement of food and nutrition. Thus, their immunity power and body resistance may have some lacking. As a result they are in the web of number of diseases. Malaria, gastric, arthritis, dysentery, Tuberculosis, anemia and cancer were noticed among them during the present study. The lack of modern facilities of communication made the Totopara an isolated province. So,

adequate medical conveniences have not reached here as it is prevailed in adjacent urban centers. Though there is a Rural Health Centre but due to the isolation of this locality medical attendants and doctors are unwilling to devote completely. As a result, the sufferers are not getting proper remedy from their problems. In Totopara 9.80 percent people were totally less interested to consult any medical care. Only 49.31 percent people took modern medical facilities, and 23.89 percent people practiced both traditional and modern medical means. Due to rapid environmental degradation the forests got devoid of medical plants. This is making the Totos to lack from indigenous medicinal methods. Thus, due to ecological and environmental degradation, the health of the Totos facing an acute crisis.

Economy is the backbone of every society. With the surrounding environment the ecological infrastructure is keenly interrelated and their interaction helps a society to develop in its own way. The change of environmental scenario has shown a great impact on the economical feature of the Totos. In early days the most important ecological pursuit of the Totos was orange cultivation and Lac cultivation, but it has now totally disappeared. The orange orchards in the Totopara was in a very good condition even up to 1930s, but, afterwards the forests were gradually started to clear for settled agriculture purposes. These orchards were unable to tolerate the sunlight directly. Due to rapid deforestation and change in the surrounding ecosystem, there occurred continuous soil erosion and high increase of temperature. Due to these anticlimactic forces, humus formation in the soil was seriously affected and it told upon the entire orange-based economy, thus it totally ruined away. In the past the Totos used to cultivate Lac-worms in the demarcated Sirish trees in the forests. They used to collect 'pipuls' from those groves and sold them to the traders. Due to rapid deforestation the Sirish trees went to abundance. As a result, the Lac industry lost its basic backbone and became completely destroyed. Previously the Totopara was prevailed with good sources of bamboo bushes in adjacent forests area. By selling the bamboos they could earn a good number of finance. Due to rapid commercialization and greed of bamboo traders the bushes were frequently went under cutting for direct monetary exchange. As a result, at present there is not a single bamboo bush in Totopara village. The bamboo was the prime source to build up houses, so with its abolishment, the house construction has also faced an acute challenge. The areca nut is one of the prime cash-crop for the Totos even today. But they could not get the profit from it, because whenever they go to sell it to their moneylenders, then the interest over their loan is cut down by the Mahajans (Money leaders). So due to environmental change the traditional economical backbone of the Totos completely destroyed. Besides Totos, there are six other communities in Totopara. The non-Toto

communities have 74.91 percent of the total population of the mouza. The Nepalese share the highest population of 71.54 percent of the total population (Filed study, 2024).

The migrant people who came in Totopara are mainly the Nepalese and it is still going on. The continuously increasing land pressure, their lack of awareness and acute poverty shifted the authority of arable lands from the hands of the Totos to the new comers. As a result, their economic infrastructure is facing a serious challenge. At present most of the Toto families depend on agricultural based work and also grazing as well as animal husbandry; some of the families engaged in fire wood collection and other forest gathering like fodder, spices, mushrooms etc.; and mines labour in Bhutan. Due to rapid land alienation and poverty, people have started to do share cropping on others land. Through the present society is agriculture based but they are lacking the knowledge of modern scientific means of agriculture. The agriculture land holding pattern gives the feature that, 10 families were landless and 243 percent had the agricultural land maximum upto 7 bighas under their own belonging. So, their resource for livelihood is mostly confined only in this mere sector. Out of 253 families 24 families were totally depend for earning on Bhutan while 122 families were depend on both India and Bhutan for their existence. Despite their labourious work and busy schedule they earn a very little amount. It has been found that among the studied families maximum monthly income was upto Rs. 10,000/- while the minimum was upto Rs. 7,000/- and with this mere source of income they anyhow managed their families having 5 members each on average. So the environmental degradation as well as deforestation both have destroyed the traditional economical pursuits which made hard to maintain the livelihood of the studied families and it has become unable to provide them any alternative economical backbone.

Family is the unit of social life. An adaptable environmental background and strong economical outfit can lead to a prosperous and integrated social life. But both these factors are completely lacking in case of the Totos. Naturally their social life would have to face a good number of problems. From functional point of view their families have four main dimensions like cohabitation, procreation, supply of food and shelter. But due to lack of occupational opportunities on Indian land, the young males of the Totos go to do mine based work in Bhutan and a major portion depend on Bhutan forest areas to collect forest materials for daily livelihood. Thus due to occupational crisis their families are on the gradual way of degradation, which have created many problems in the daily life and survival. Their struggle regarding survival has faced the people to develop a competitive mind to become fittest and exist on the world. So, this made their bond of social interaction to get more and weaker. For the

children, family is the fundamental unit from where they learn the lesson of humanity and develop their characters for personality formation. But by birth they observed an acute inconvenience and crisis in every aspect of their life which has a serious effect and it has made them distant from their adjacent civilized world. Mostly the studied people were the first generation learner. At present 46.78 came into contact in education. Out of which there were 335 male and 173 female. Among the literates 35 were without any standard and rest 269 was within standards, mainly within primary level. Till date only 2 people from the studied people had completed graduation level of education. As the mothers were in the dark of illiteracy, so their children could not properly learn the first educational lesson from their mothers. As a result the awareness had devoided them off from early basic education and also the way to lead life in a hygienic manner. Their appearance is very shabby and bizarre. The lack of environmental nourishment and struggle for life has made their mind set up far from proper implications and all these factors have made the whole social life enmeshed with acute problems. Due to the cultural pressure from adjacent locality their own cultural traits are gradually on the way of abolishment. The food pattern, dress pattern, choice of art and literature, style of ornaments have diverted far from their traditional means. But as the marketized dresses are quite costly, so often they could not afford it. As a result they wear on little dresses on their body and just in this manner they have to fight with adverse climatic condition in winter. The social and cultural problems also lead to religious problems. The whole Toto community was treated as under the Hindu fold. In 1997 Baptist Missionary of Nagaland has influenced 3 families have gone to convert in Christianity (Field Study, 2024). As a result these families have gone to the outside from the core of traditional Toto society and also they were debarred from the ceremonial and socio religious life. Their traditional village panchayat system has now nearly on the way of abolishment and now the region has come under statutory panchayat as well as judicial and administrative authority. However, due to lack of education and unawareness, these people cannot at all understand these sort of complexities and thus from legal concern what they face, is only deprivation and frustration. So, the frequent environmental changes have forced the people to suffer from all round set back from the socio-economic and socio-cultural perspective.

Conclusion

The problem of the present Toto society is multiferous. It is true that Central and State Government has done a lot of work to develop their livelihood. Through tribal sub plan (TSP) and with the help of Gram Panchayat (GP), 100 households and 140 latrines have been made among them. But these sorts of things cannot solve their actual

problem. The root cause behind their all problem lies in their environmental background. Exploitation of natural resources and rapid deforestation had caused a serious challenge to the ecological balance. So, at first the environmental degradation should have to be protected. With gradual invasion of the outsiders the rights of the Totos own land handed over to the others, and they got enmeshed in the web of indebtedness. Government should have to look into this matter seriously and immediately they have to control the outward flow of tribal land. The Totos should have to give the knowledge of modern means of agricultural technology so that they can produce the crops throughout the year and can achieve both of their means of consumption and surplus. The Totos are engaged in mining activities in Bhutan and till now many families collect forest resources for their livelihood from Bhutan areas. As a result the Bhutanese culture has a very prominent impact on their daily life style. The concept of geographical territory is ignorable to them because for their survival. So, if due to political reason national boundary that is the demarcation line between India and Bhutan is strictly followed and restricted, then obviously the Totos will have to suffer a major setback if their economy is concerned. But, to pressure their own cultural heritage and protect the national integration of India they should have to be given appropriate opportunities that they can make themselves engaged in various occupations in Indian Territory and lead a peaceful and happy life. Education is the prime key of development for every society and here the Totos are facing a serious problem. Mainly their poverty and also the long traditional cultural practices, continuous detachment from education, communication, and transportation have prevented them to go through higher education. Government and administration must have to implement appropriate measures so that the people can understand the importance of education. Besides that, the teachers appointed in Totopara should have to understand the mind and need of the common people. The educated people of urban centre or other areas must be without showing any kind of hatred and biasness, have to adapt with their psychological mind and its concerned need. Besides, awareness regarding daily livelihood the people should have to be protected with adequate medical

facilities. With the changing dimension of time obviously the modernization will come in every society but those modern trends should only be followed when those can help in the betterment for any society; where the globalized trend of food, dress, culture and life style adversely affect the traditional cultural heritage of an isolated population then they should be rejected at once. Already the Totos have lost their environmental and economic securities but these should have to be revived very soon. If all the factors and degeneration of ecological scenario continues, then, only the time will tell us whether they will exist further more in the society or be abolished. All the concerned people of civilized society should have to make an honest and heartiest effort for the Totos from the perspective of our national integration by providing them the right of survival by giving the priority to protect the balance of environment for those people as well as for whole society and civilization.

References

1. Census of India (2011) Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi.
2. De, Soumitra (2005) Participatory Forest Management And Democratic Decentralisation In India: Focus On The Pioneer State, Siliguri. NL Publishers.
3. Majumder B (1991) A Sociological Study of the Toto Folk Tales. Asiatic Society.
4. Das AK (1967) the Totos. Cultural Research Institute (11).
5. Sanyal CC (1963) the Meches and the Totos Two Sub-Himalayan Tribes of North Bengal. University of North Bengal.
6. Sarkar A (1993) Toto: Society and Change (A Sub-Himalayan Tribe of West Bengal). Firma KLM Private Limited.