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Toto Primitive Tribe in Conserving Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary

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Short Abstract

This paper is about Primitive tribal Group Toto in Indo-Bhutan foothills with only a few more than 1000 population living in Totopara village and their contribution in Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary of West Bengal, India.

Long Abstract

This paper is about Primitive tribal Group Toto in Indo-Bhutan foothills with only a few more than 1000 population living in Totopara village and their contribution in Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary of West Bengal, India. They believe that there are ruins of King Nol.

They do not go in jungle for big game hunting, but actually collect fuel and various yam, jungle potato, catechu and fruits. They once developed cane vegetation and bamboo on slopes. From bamboo they still make baskets essential for this porter tribe. They pray to the hills and river and believe that these natural objects possess spirit, and they yearly offer sacrifices to them. They domesticate livestock including boar and hybrid cattle called *Mithun*. This paper is here to focus on the notion towards conserving Titi forest pocket lying Indo-Bhutan foothills beneath Bhutan Himalayas on the right bank of *Torsha* River and associated with Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary that has been recently promoted as a National Park (India).

Totos have shifted from slash-and-burn cultivation to Swedish cultivation (Shifting Cultivation) and now terrace cultivation on bench terraces. They preserve medicinal and fruit plants, catechu, silk cotton, teak and other wood plants. They from orange orchard (agro-forestry) have now shifted to areca nut cultivation. They propagate millet and corn followed by rice, wheat and vegetables and even spices. They learnt agriculture from Nepali speaking groups, but a major section is fallen under agricultural labour category. Their social system comprises of *Kaiji*, *Gapu*, *Pau*, *Yongtong*, *Yangpui* and the commoners that generally avoid destroying ecosystem and have a notion of conserving the bio-resources.

Elephant and leopard attacks are not reported in Totopara. Toto people have yet now no criminal record.

Key Words: Toto, Totopara, Jaldapara, *Gapu*, *Kaiji*, Bhutan, animism, *Amuchu*

Toto Tribe

Toto tribe is one of the three Primitive Tribal Groups (PTG) of West Bengal state in India. In their physical feature, Toto people are of Mongoloid stock with a darker skin. The language they speak now-a-days has so many outer influences due to their outer exposures. But traditionally Toto language is related to sub-Himalayan groups under 'Tibeto Himalaya Branch' of 'Tibeto-Burman subfamily' under Tibeto-Chinese family. They are similar to that of Rai, Limbu or Subba, Lepcha or Rong, Dhimal and Bhutia and such others residing

in the Tibeto-Himalayas to sub-Himalayan regions (Grierson, 1909: 250-251; Sanyal, 1973: 45). Moitra (2004) calculated the separation of Toto from *Dhimal*, by grutochronological analysis, as 800-1200 AD. Toto language is “non-pronominalized”, whereas Dhimal or Dhemale of is basically a “pronominalized” one where influence of ancient Munda language can be clearly visible (Majumdar, 1991:50). Most of the Dhimals have become Hinduized and are further related to Rajbongshi or Rajbanshi caste people and Tharu. Dhimals today are no longer present in *Duars*, but in Morong and Siliguri *Terai* in Indo-Nepal borderline (Mechi-Mahananda-Konki river system). Dhimal, Rajbanshi and Tharu are good examples of pronominalized bulk. Rajbanshis have influenced by Bengali and other mainstream languages as well as distinctly classified Bodic languages like Koch.

Totos were supposed to be prevailing from Teesta to Sankosh-Gadadhar at a time; due to several causes the community gradually abolished outside Totopara; those reasons might be malaria, black fever, and other epidemics, demographic shift, change in nature-human interactions, alleged oppression of Bhutanese superordinates and external influences. They might have been absorbed by other communities like the Mech (Bodo group). Mech (Bodo) people are found sporadically in entire *Duars* with a higher concentration in Assam *Duars* (Bodoland Autonomous Territory). Mech people also exist in Ballalguri and Madarihat. Totos might have fractionally moved back into Bhutan Himalayas and Sikkim as well as in Nepal and intermingled with locals like Doya, Lepcha, Garo, and Dhimal. That was probably the remoteness of Totopara for what the Totos could maintain their identity.

Totos were nearly extinct in the 1951, but protective measures from the Constitution of India have helped preserving their heritage and assure a steady population growth. The total population of Totos according to 1951 census was 321 living in 69 different houses at Totopara. In 1991 census, the Toto population had increased to 926 who lived in 180 different houses. In the 2001 census, their number had increased to 1,184. In 2006, Totos have a population of around 1,300 individuals that has now been increased to around 1,800 in 2011. Totos were basically a porter tribe carrying goods between Bhutan and North Bengal (India).

Totos maintain thirteen exogamous clans (*sarkhae*). These are *Linkajibei*, *Dankobei*, *Dantrobei*, *Nubebei*, *Machingbei*, *Mantrobei*, *Mankobei*, *Bongobei*, *Budubei*, *Budhbei*, *Piso-changobei*, *Nurun-changobei*, and *Dhiren- changobei*. Totos have still in their cognition maintained community sentiment, clan property, and supremacy of *Gapu* and *Kaiji* (political and religious leaders respectively). *Gapu* is actually owner of this total property of Totopara. British in 19th Century provided protection to the Totos and reduced the rank of pro-Bhutan *Kaiji* below the *Gapu* as a tax hoarder. In Toto society, *Gapu* and *Kaiji* are also regarded as *Mondal* and *Subba*. Besides them, Totos have developed posts like *Yangpui*, *Pau*, *Yongtong*, *Kharbari* (messenger), and *Chowkidar* (village guard). They had the *Amepha* as their traditional rural governing body. *Yongtong* is basically an elderly person of the lineage or clan from the Toto society. They primarily take care of normatic behaviours regarding rites-de-passage. Totos also exhibit their gratitude to priestly categories *Pau* present in each hamlet. *Pau* is their traditional medicine men. *Jhankiri* of Nepali community also deals with medicinal plants, disease treatment, mental health and

spirit possession. *Yongtong* and *Pau* are associates of *Gapu* and *Kaiji*. Previously, there were *Yangpui* to assist both *Gapu* and *Kaiji*. Sugrib Toto is now the *Gapu*. *Jitsang Heubba* is the chief priest. Together, they maintain the Toto social system.

According to Murdock's classification, Toto kinship terminology is of Hawaiian type (Sarkar, 1993:25). They call in their relatives as *Neoscha* which is of two types- *miphu papaya* (consanguinal) and *pami-bei* (affinal). Cross cousin marriage is however permitted along with widow marriage, polygyny, and love marriage. Negotiated marriage and monogamy are but the most preferred. There are four usual ways of acquiring the mate viz., (1) marriage by negotiation (*Thulbehoea*), (2) marriage by escape (*Chor-behoea*), (3) marriage by capture (*Sambehoea*) and (4) love marriage (*Lamalami*). Marriage is now held in the months of January, February and March. Actually, the Toto people once sold their orange throughout the winter and autumn. They had the money to arrange the marriage ceremony. They now invite other community people and serve them tea, fruit juice, fowl and goat. But, at a time two cattle from each side and a pig were butchered and served to the whole community in the village or hamlet. They prepare *Eu* which is their alcohol prepared of fermented rice and millet. If a man's wife dies, he may marry the deceased wife's younger sister, but a woman cannot marry her deceased husband's brother. On the death (*sipna*) of a spouse, the husband or wife must remain single for twelve months before he or she is free to remarry. They usually carry the dead body wrapped in a *Toe* (thatched mattress made up of bamboo flakes and jungle leaves) on the shoulder of two men and they bury their dead either at burial ground or at the backyard. Purification (*Tame*) is organized on 6th day or 5th day for male and female respectively. For the next one

year, the widow or widower cannot use umbrella, cannot cut the hair, and cannot go to river and even a large tree. He or she has to stay and sleep with a wooden stick (*dey*) symbolic to the departed one. That would protect the individual or family from any malevolent spirit. Parallel cousin marriage, clan endogamy, and polyandry are strictly prohibited. Extra marital relationship is strongly criticized, and no custom of divorce is there. Separation (*paiesua* or *peismi*) and adoption (*puiya aiyama*) are practiced among the Totos. Pre marital relationship is permitted if it leads into the institution of marriage where two families organize themselves by the exchange system. Marriage outside the Toto society is an offence; there are few instances which have not been appreciated by the society. Marriages with outside communities or sexual intercourse like with Bihari, Nepali and Mech (Bodo) have occurred in past and they are treated as punishable offence. Even eating with outsiders other than Lepchas and Bhutias were offended. There is a provision of *Sangailaomi* or *Sangai-Lam-Pami* which is a ceremony of confession before the entire clan. There is no concept of youth dormitory. However, hostel facility is there for the students in school.

Habitation of the Totos

Sanyal (1973) stated that probably the Totos prevailed throughout entire Western *Duars* or Bengal *Duars*. That place was actually taken up from Bhutan by the British who added the Bhutan foothills into Jalpaiguri district. Some facts I would like to share here-

1. Bhutan war between British in India and Royal Kingdom of Bhutan was happened in 1865. Koch-Rajbanshi dynasty in Cooch Behar had been a collaborator of Mughal-Rajput alliance and therefore had border disputes with Bhutan. British in Bengal Presidency intervened in the matter.
2. Bhutan *Duars* Act in 1868 assumed full control of British East India Company in favour of Mughal Padshahi over the *Duars* area so far incorporated and divided into western Bengal *Duars* and eastern Assam *Duars*.
3. In post-independent India also Bengal *Duars* is still in Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal state, India. West Bengal is a state of India comprising of 29 states and six Union Territories. West Bengal possesses 19 districts of which northern six constitute northern part of the state. This northern West Bengal is an administrative figure named as North Bengal. Six districts of North Bengal are Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, Malda (also Maldah), North Dinajpur (Uttar Dinalpur), and South Dinajpur (Dakshin Dinajpur). Jalpaiguri is the largest among them by the virtue of Bengal *Duars*.
4. Along Indo-Bhutan border, there are 18 doors or Duar and as a result of this, the place is known as *Duars* or Doors. Eight doors have been fallen in Bengal *Duars* or Jalpaiguri district and the rest ones in Assam. The term “Duar” is also used in various other sub-Himalayan and nearby highland pockets. Eight doors in Bengal *Duars* of Jalpaiguri along Indo-Bhutan boundary are namely Chalsa-Malbazar, Jom Duar or Mainaguri, Chamurchi Duar of Jaldhaka and Singtam, Lucky Duar or Luxmi Duar (Totopara is situated here), Alipurduar-Hasimara, Bauxa Duar, Kumargramduar, and Sankosh.

5. Forest types in *Duars* are here as follows-

- ✓ Northern Dry Deciduous
- ✓ Eastern *Terai* Sal
- ✓ East Himalayan Moist Mixed Deciduous Forest
- ✓ Sub-Himalayan Secondary Wet Mixed Forest
- ✓ Eastern Sub-Montane Semi-evergreen Forest
- ✓ Northern Tropical Evergreen Forest
- ✓ East Himalayan Subtropical Wet Hill Forest
- ✓ Moist Sal Savannah
- ✓ Low alluvium
- ✓ Savannah Woodland

6. Many of these forests have been reduced by establishment of tea gardens and human settlements.

7. Now, Jalpaiguri district covers an area of 6,245 km² and lies between 26° 16' and 27° 0' North latitudes and 88° 4' and 89° 53' East longitudes.

Totopara village

This village on ancient trade route Laxmi Duar was primarily inhabited by the Totos.

Location: This Totopara hamlet or *mouza* is located at 26° 50'N latitude and 89° 20'E longitude of Ballalguri area under Madarihat administrative block and police station in Alipurduar Sub- Division of Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal, India. Totopara is about 22 Km. from Madarihat town and 5 Km. from Ballalguri village.

Natural boundary: Totopara village is surrounded by the Bhutan foothills to the north, *Torsha* River to the east, and Titi and Hauri tributaries and the Titi reserve forest to south-west.

Communication: A single lane crossing Titi and Hauri tributaries twice connects the village with the National Highway 31 through Hantapara. An alternative jungle path through Titi reserve forest is also there along the right bank of *Torsha* River. At the left bank of this river lies Hasimara-Joygaon route to Bhutan.

Brief History:

1. The first settlement survey was conducted at Totopara in 1989-1994 that was then under Toto traditional political system. The whole area was recorded of about 3.12 square miles in the name of Toto chief (*Mondal* or *Gapu*) on behalf of entire community (Sundar, 1895: 86-88; Das, 1967: 8-9; Sanyal, 1973: 10).
2. In 1951 Census of India, the total area of Totopara was earmarked at 1,996 acres (8.0814 km²) and that was unreserved.

3. Individual land ownership was introduced in Totopara in 1969 and the District Collector possessed more than 1,600 acres of the total area leaving only 347.43 acres of land to then 89 Toto families.
4. However, the Totos still continued to cultivate in around 400 acres of the residual land at the south-eastern direction of the Totopara village; that place on the bank of *Torsha* River was a fertile stretch, but within 1981-82 the forest department took over its possession in the ambit of the Forest Conservation Act.
5. The original 347.43 acres of land under the Totopara could not remain free from outside encroachers as many non-Totos, especially the Nepali speaking Gorkha identity holder people (Gurkha) could be found in Totopara. They have come to this place and permanently settle down there. Majority of the Totos are taking their basic formal education in Bengali version as the first language which is also the highest spoken language in the state of West Bengal. But they are thankful to the Nepali speakers who have actually introduced settled cultivation into this sub-Himalayan slope.
6. Totopara village is composed of six hamlets – Panchayat Gaon, Mandal Gaon, Subba Gaon, Mitrang Gaon, Puja Gaon and Dumchi Gaon. The market place is located at Panchayet Gaon which is the heartland of Totopara.
7. More than 72 acres of Toto land have been already gone into the hands of non-Toto groups, especially the Nepali speakers good with agricultural management in hilly slopes.

8. Besides Totos, other communities and caste groups reside presently in Totopara and that include Nepali speaking groups like Limbu or Subba, Tamang, Manger, Kami, Damai, Sarki, Ghate, Gurung, Newar, Chhetri, Rai, and Baun; Hindi speaking Sunri, Sunwar, Chamar, Muslim, and Marwari; Bengali speaking Goala; a Rajbanshi; and five other tribal communities like Garo, Mech (Bodo), Sherpa, Lepcha and Oraon.
9. A primary school was established in the village in 1990. Later in 1995, a high school with hostel facility was also established there. There is one primary healthcare centre in Totopara. To encourage ethno-tourism, a proposal is there to make a park in Totopara. There are two primary schools, one mother-and-children welfare center, one high school, a village library, a rural commercial bank, agricultural cooperative, a primary health center with 6 bed facility, one veterinary center, six adult education centers under *Toto Kalyan Samiti*, a post-office, a tribal welfare center, a residential hostel, a clubhouse (*poikimsha*), a video hall, few shops and eating places in the market, place for weekly market, and one Self-Help Group.
10. In this era of Global Market Economy, Totos are now going outside their village in search of job. Sometimes that looks like their ancient trade routes persisting in entire *Duars*. Toto like other forest dwellers always demand on control over the forest resources as they know well about recycling, feedback and resource management in traditional ways. They do not oppose Forest Conservation Act, but stand in favour of implementation of Forest Rights Act.

So, a question definitely emerges out- whether they could contribute into protecting these reserve forests, wildlife sanctuaries and National Parks? If yes, then how?

Totopara in Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary

Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary was established in 1941 for the purpose of protecting the great Indian one-horned Rhinoceros and due to presence of rich bio-diversity, the region has now been provided the status of a National Park in 2011-12. Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary (now the Jaldapara National Park) is situated at the foothills of Eastern Himalayas in Alipurduar Sub-Division of Jalpaiguri district in West Bengal. Jaldapara is spread across 216.51 km² of vast grassland with patches of riverside forests. It is again connected to Gorumara National Park, Buxa National Park, Manas National Park and many reserve forests and sanctuaries like Chilapata and Chapramari. Some important fauna of this region are Royal Bengal Tiger, clouded leopard, Himalayan black bear, sloth bear, Indian wild dogs or Indian wolf, civet, pangolin, small cats, elephant, rhino, chital, sambar deer, barking deer, hog deer, gaur (commonly known as Indian bison), wild buffaloes, antelope, wild boar, numerous rodents including giant squirrels, hispid hare; several snakes including Indian python, king cobra, and other venomous snake; numerous migratory birds including the rare brahminy duck, and local birds including flycatcher, drongo, red jungle fowl, peafowls, hornbill, numerous woodpeckers and pheasants. Major wood-yielding plants are Sal, Teak, Champa, Gamar, Simul, and Chikrasi. Here, forests contain some other important plants also- Rain Tree (*Shirish* or *Albizia lebbbeck*), Silk Cotton (*Shimul* or

Bombax malabaricum) trees, bamboo groves, *Terai* grassland vegetation and tropical riverine reeds. More than 300 species of trees, 250 species of shrubs, 400 species of herbs, 9 species of cane, 10 species of bamboo, 150 species of orchids, 100 species of grass and 130 species of aquatic flora including more than 70 sedges (Cyperaceae), 284 species of birds, 73 species of mammals, 76 species of snakes, and 5 species of amphibians with the highest fish diversity of North Bengal have been so far found in nearby Bauxa National Park. On the other hand, Gorumara has recorded 50 species of mammals, 193 species of birds, 22 species of reptiles, 7 species of turtles, 27 species of fishes and other macro and micro fauna. *Jalda* was probably the name of a tribe that now has been completely extinct.

Toto is the smallest tribal group of Jalpaiguri district in West Bengal. Their settlement Totopara is located primarily at a hillock in the Titi reserve forest and by the bank of Torsha River of Jaldapara. At that time the entire Jaldapara region was called as “Totopara” and covered up with dense forest. Toto tribe used to stay in sub-Himalayan Jaldapara area of Bengal *Duars* from or before 1800 AD. There are many other places whose names are with the prefix Toto or Tot or Tat. Such places are again located nearer to places with a name frame of Bhutni or Bhot (such as Bhotpatti or Bhutnirghat). Toto people have shed off hunting for now, but actually they are good hunters. Due to prevalence of deep forest, the Totos remain nearly completely isolated from mainland even after independence, that were the Nepali speaking Gorkhas (Gurkhas) and Swedish Mission exposing them to the world.

Titi forest is primarily composed of mixed *deciduous* foothill forest associated with Savanna grasslands as well as ferns typical to a rain forest. In the bank of Torsha River, widespread

grasslands covered up with *thadda* and wild varieties of cane are there. Rhinos are fond of these. *Chopsi* and *Mailsa* also grow up there that attract elephants of Jaldapara. The Titi reserve forest contains python, snakes, leopard, elephant, boar, bear, deer, tiger and so forth. Interestingly, wild beasts do not usually enter into or attack on Totopara. There is no news of elephant attack in Totopara for rice or alcoholic beverage. Totos actually worship the river Torsha and the festival is known as *Amuchu*. Actually, in Bhutan the Torsha River is known by the name *Amu* and *Chu* means the river. This *Amu* or *Amo* River begins at Chumbi valley in Tibet. Chumbi valley is now under Tibet Autonomous Territory of China, but at a time that was a place of dispute among Tibet, Bhutan and Sikkim. Today, Torsha crosses four countries and they are China, Bhutan, India (North Bengal that contains Jalpaiguri district and Totopara), and ultimately Bangladesh. Totos were porter tribe and therefore their mode of production was not exploiting the forest resources.

They also go to river *Torsha* and its tributaries flowing near this Totopara and catch varieties of local fishes. Fish is a delicacy for them. They more prefer meat. Fishing is done more in rainy season when varieties of small fishes and snails are available in good number and served as source of nutrition and minerals. Dried fishes are also available in local market. Other communities buy fishes from the market transported from outside. Some quick growing fishes like *Tilapia* are now cultivated in the hand packed water tanks filled up through water pipelines from Bhutan. Currently, bore well has been dug up in Totopara that was a long demand for them. They reach to the water level at around 500 feet deep inside at the high school ground of Panchayet Gaon hamlet.

Local people in Madarihat-Falakata say that the entire region was once covered up with wild cane verities and there was no such agricultural biodiversity as such. Those swamps were usual habitat of snake and migratory birds. Thereafter cane bushes were nearly totally replaced from *Torsha* biosphere by traditional orange orchards and lac production units maintained by the Totos. And finally orange and lac have been removed by areca nut plantation. However, dense bamboo bushes are still grown up in hilly slopes and uplands with heavy rains.

Totos doing shifting cultivation and raising their livestock along with hunting, gathering, fishing and carrying the goods of Bhutanese traders through the jungles have now been shifted fully into settled cultivation. They still go in jungle to collect wild vegetables, other food supplements, bamboo, bushes, wood, grass, leaves, dry fuel wood, *ling* (jungle and spiny potatoes), rhizomes, yams, mushrooms, caterpillar, wasp, spider, and honey.

Previously, Totos practiced slash-and-burn cultivation or Swedish cultivation where they first selected a part of the jungle in winter full of dry leaf piles; they set fire; with mild raining in late winter and bright sunshine throughout autumn, they let the ash providing nutrients to the soil and controlling the pests; in summer and pre-monsoon, they using their digging sticks with stone rings sowed seeds and raise seedlings into crops.

What Nepalis cultivate here in Totopara are paddy, maize, millet (*marua* and *kaon*), potato, sweet potato, knolkhol, radish, turpin, tapioca, arum, cane, bamboo, areca nut, nuts, mustard and other rapeseeds, vegetables, tomato, cabbage, cauliflower, cucumber, gourd, bean, yam, rhizomes, chilly, peppercorn, clove, cardamom, cassia, ginger, turmeric, winter

paddy, wheat, and so forth. Totos with agricultural land generally cultivate millet, areca, malt (instead of wheat) and corn associated with a few vegetables, rapeseeds and even rice. They produce their crops in bench terraces instead of contour trenches seen at relatively higher altitudes. Terraces are good to reduce soil erosion, hold the rain water and cultivate the land with bullock (*pi'ka*), plough (*holo*), wooden beam (*jua*) and hinge (*tong*). They also prefer to raise crops in the clayey soil at Torsha basin. Most of those fertile lands have been shifted to non-Totos. Totos often do not use bullock and plough, but simple agricultural tools like dibble, axe, big knife, spade and sickle. They imitate the Nepalis holding big knife or *khukuri*. They still use hand-rotating grinding machine made up of stone. They have also utilized wooden husking bowl and the wooden beam (*sing* and *dibrung*). Entire *Duars* is a heaven for tea estates. Totos did not permit their land for any such tea plantation. In this way, the Totos are serving for both forest and agricultural biodiversity.

Totos believe in nuclear family and in average number of family members does not exceed over five. This type of mode of reproduction does not exploit the natural resources at a large scale. Talking with Mr. Dhaniram Toto (45) in Totopara on last autumn (2012), he is criticizing the mainstream people for causing a population boom and overpopulating the globe. According to him, the world is not only for the humans but for all the creatures and non-living objects. Totos are animists and have a notion of protection to the nature inbuilt in their worldview. Totos are of opinion of family planning and therefore not putting on excess pressure on nature. This is in their faith-fear-belief system. They worship nature and consider different natural objects to the Supernature. They form a distinct triangle of

nature, human and Supernature. Totos pray to road, sky, hills, forest, rivers, moon, star and sun.

Fowl, goat, pig and cow are domestic creatures of this village Totopara. Totos also rear *Mithun* (a hybrid variety of cattle), pig and hen. *Mithun* is a bit different from Indian cow, Tibetan yak or wild bison of *Duars* jungles. They are the source of milk and high protein meat. They usually describe their cow by the name *pi'ka*. Totos consume pork, beef, red meat, fowl and pigeon. They collect *laca* or *koddu* (knolkhol) that they boil and feed the pig reared by them. Most prevalent plants in their agro-forestry are not orange (*santra*), but areca (*guai*), jackfruit (*dasse*), prickly (*buguri* or *gorse*) and sugarcane (*mencha*). Banana is also grown in Totopara. Totos know the use of tobacco and both the gender smoke. They also prepare smoking object like *bidi* (thin cheroot) from dry catechu leaf putting the tobacco inside. Catechu or *khoir* is a good source of dye. Its spines can be used at the place of areca nut. Its seeds are source of cotton. The plant is also known as silk cotton. Catechu tree bark is used during festivals; Totos also take the bark in boiled condition with salt. They intake areca or *guai* with *pan* or betel leaf and this leaf is known as *parai* or *purai* to them. They prepare their alcohol *Eu* by fermenting *marua* (millet, *Setaria italica*), *kaoni* (millet, *Eleusine coracana*) and even local rice. They put them in huge earthen or metal pot with water having a three inches upper level from the grains. Within two to three days and nights the stuff ferments and foams come up. They can mix more grains and water to the chamber. A sweet smell is coming out from this. Traditional pumpkin spoon or gourd coat (calabash) they term as *tahati* and use to serve *Eu* to all in bamboo made vessels (*Poipa* or

wooden glasses). This is somewhat like *Chhang* traditional beverage of Bhutan and Tibet. The cereals left over in the bucket are used as cattle feed and piggery.

Besides cultivation, Totos at Totopara are involved in household work, bamboo crafts including basket making, service, petty business and animal husbandry. They know wooden works (such as making wooden bowl and bucket) and can manufacture clay-made pitcher from variously shaped lump of soil that they brought in from Teesta River basin. Bamboo is an important raw material for the Totos. Their thatched baskets are termed as *toto*. They make these baskets and those were once used for carriage of goods in steep mountain passes. Baskets are used also as water filters (*jittang*). They also produce brooms, winnowing trays, ropes, mats, and stirrers from bamboo. Totos always maintain their bamboo groves sacred. Totos were self sufficient in meeting their protein requirement and therefore they are still not interested in poaching. Wood and bamboo are also utilized in making houses (*nakosa*)- 1 to 2 meters above from the ground with an open projected bamboo platform in front (*dui*), grass roof with slope, floor-cum-wall of bamboo, staircase of single log (*kaipei*), and wooden blocks (*kempira*).

These products from bamboo may also be prepared from animal skin. Totos were once pastorals and entered from Tibet and Bhutan. Or they were originally the inhabitants of the foothills who were brought in captive to Bhutan Himalayas and enslaved. Later they worked as junior collaborators of Bhutan Kingdom in *Duars* and then became part of Indian nation. Chewing the areca nut seems to be quite similar to *chhurpi* made up of dried yak milk. Yak wool once had great demand in the plains and used in religious purposes. Yak meat was a good source of high protein. Totos take tea without sugar but with salted

butter. This is a Tibetan way of preparing tea. Bhutia traders once got into these plains with their goods on the back of *tangan* horses. During winter, Bhutanese *Sharchop* tribes came down to *Duars* due to heavy snowfall in high altitude Bhutan Himalayas. They brought with them orange, wool, yak skin, yak milk product *Chhurpi*, fermented alcohol *Chham* and Tibetan horses and dogs. Totos do not domesticate Yak but *pi'ka*.

Totos may once be the leather workers or assisted in leather making process. Their ceremonial ground is *Demsha*. Dom is a common term for the group who deal with leather work, dead creatures and making of bamboo and cane products. *Bakung* is a kind of drum that the Totos place in *Demsha*. They bred lac worms in *Shirish* tree (*Albizia lebbeck*). Lac secretion is now only used as sealing wax, but once was at large scale in varnishing leather goods and dying silk. Forests in North Bengal contain mulberry plants and local varieties silk worm. *Duars* trade routes in Indo-Tibet region were actually sub-lanes of ancient Silk Route. One of the main attractions in nearby Chilapata Reserve Forest is the ruins of "Nalraja Garh", or fort of the Nal kings, built in the Gupta period in the fifth century A.D., the Golden Age of India. On the other side of Torsha River, there is the Kaljani river system and Bauxa National Park. *Drukpa* is a little community settled there and they are encouraged by the Forest Department in rubber plantation as small scale agro-forestry. These fragile *Terai-Duars* forests are associated with Indo-Malaya biome that is good for rubber. Rubber is an alternative to leather.

However, *tangan* horses and lac production have been vanished from Jaldapara just similar to orange and cane vegetation. Orange plants are still sporadically there in Totopara; and germination of orange plant is a natural indicator of winter raining. Deforestation and

growing temperature were the causes behind the end of orange plantations. And for that we cannot hold Totos responsible. Rather Totos only utilize minor forest produces along with fire wood in a controlled manner. They actually protect the forest.

Totos also pray to clan deity *Choisung* and soul of the departed ancestors *Chimadora*. Totos have belief in *Mana*. They do not go at night to *Ishpa* black hills where according to them stay two malevolent male spirits (*Bindi-kepa* and *Yasudang-choishu*) and one female (*Choiria*) in the deep greenery. In that sense, entire black hill has been converted into a sacred grove. Totos have faith on benevolent spirit *Bansak-pa* the female deity of jungle. In Demsha, Totos pray to *Ishpa* and the ceremony is known as *Goram*. Additionally, Totos perform worship of deities like *Chungsa*(forest), *Yogoi* (hill), *Tading*(hill), *Se-Ti* (river), *Nepu-Ti* (river), *Hiting-Ti* (river), *Mu-Ti* (river), *Bi-Ti* (river), *Barsang*, *Kacheme*, *Pyachu*, *Kumbi*, *Phuduwa* or *Pudiya*, *Choisung*, *Singwabe*, etc. I have also met with certain terms like *Ziang Chhira*, *Gorea*, *Bongo*, *Mangkha*, and *Angshu*. Totos in their language designate any worship with the term *kobi* and sacrifice fowl or pigeon. Before going into hunting, they used to perform *Sunchako kobi*. These things behave like a natural taboo and for that Totos do not cause spoil or damage to the bio-recourse of Totopara and nearby rivers and hills and forests. And if they do so, they have a notion of feedback. Interesting thing is that there is such report of ambush between Toto people and wild beasts.

Conclusion

Totos in Totopara have been successful to preserve their identity. They have strong resilience and self-control. They know about their problems and again how to solve them. They are not opposing modernity. The ancient routes through *Duars* have been lost, but Totos are still maintaining their folk life. They provide women higher than average status in their patriarchal family. Toto way of living is based on nature and many changes in it are according to the nature. Totos actually do not hamper nature, but want to live within the nature. Totos in Jaldapara National Park have adapted to such a way of living that is very closer to biodiversity. Totos are actually protecting the nature. Their belief in Supernature also stands in favour of saving the natural resource.

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