



## TOTO TRIBES IN HIGHER EDUCATION: EXPLORING PRESENT STATUS AND GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

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### RESEARCH ARTICLE



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#### Abstract

The Toto tribes experience marginalization in various aspects of their lives, including sociocultural, economic, and educational domains. Education is vital in promoting their sociocultural, economic, and educational development. Achieving equity and inclusion in higher education is crucial to effectively address these disparities. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 acknowledges the transformative potential of community engagement in higher education. For the Toto tribes, higher education is crucial for individual advancement and the collective progress and empowerment of their community. It acts as a pathway to increased opportunities, social inclusion, and sustainable development, ultimately contributing to the overall well-being and resilience of the Toto tribes. By ensuring equal access to higher education, the Toto tribes can enhance their sociocultural identity, economic prospects, and educational achievements, thereby facilitating their overall empowerment and integration into mainstream society. The objective of this investigation serves a dual purpose. Firstly, it is intended to investigate the current condition of the Toto Tribes in the realm of higher education. Secondly, it aims to examine the various measures and policies implemented by the Government to encourage the advancement of Toto Tribes in higher education. The state of the Toto tribes in higher education demonstrates discrepancies, characterized by restricted access and participation rates. Government initiatives, including scholarships and reservation policies, endeavor to foster higher education among the Toto tribes; nevertheless, challenges endure, encompassing insufficient infrastructure and socio-economic obstacles. Higher education plays a pivotal role in the socio-economic empowerment and preservation of the cultural heritage of the Toto tribes. While the government acknowledges the significance of community involvement and fairness in higher education, addressing paramount challenges such as infrastructure and awareness is crucial. Policymakers may encourage Toto tribes' assimilation into mainstream civilization and holistic empowerment by providing fair access and supportive conditions. In the end, higher education in the Toto community acts as a catalyst for social inclusion, group advancement, and sustainable development.

**Keywords:** *Toto Tribes, Tribal Communities, Higher Education; Equity, Inclusion, Community Participation*

#### Introduction

Many social transformations have occurred in Indian history. Most of them encompass the caste system, followed religiously in our society. Apart from the social structure in the urban area, other societies arose on the sidelines, known as tribal societies. The citizens who lived within these communities of tribes were generally linked to their fellow members. A tribe is a politically autonomous group of people who share a shared culture (Debnath et al., 2021). There are 38 tribes in West Bengal, comprising about 2% of the population. Santal (51.8%, largest), Oraon, Munda, Bhumij, Bhutia, Sherpa, Toto, Rabha, Lodha, etc are some of them (Debnath et al., 2021). Many ethnic tribes, along the Metch, Madasia, Santhal, Bodo, Tamang, Rabha, and Toto, are in the Alipurduar district. The Toto tribe is one of the most distinctive tribes, and the Toto community is one of the prominent tribal groups in the northern parts of West Bengal. They live in six villages in Toto para on the Indo-Bhutan border under Madarihat police station in the newly formed Alipurduar district of West Bengal, India. A river, Torsha is flowing to the east of the village. Their village, Totopara, is a remote, forested hillside community (Paul, 2021). There are 1387 Toto (as of the 2011 census), and just 30.35% are literate.

Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Agenda is to ensure everyone can access inclusive, equitable, high-quality education and lifetime learning opportunities. According to Article 46 of the Constitution, the state will advance the educational and economic interests of the weaker elements of Indian society, particularly the Schedule Tribes. This provision reflects India's concerns about the welfare of the country's weaker segments. However, the educational status of people in tribal areas cannot be expanded.

Tribal communities, basically the Toto communities, are socio-cultural and educationally very backward compared to other communities. There are many educational challenges, such as Inadequate transportation and communication systems, inadequate infrastructure, Lack of awareness, poverty, and Language.

So, the researchers will attempt to investigate the current condition of the Toto Tribes in higher education and examine the various measures and policies implemented by the Government to encourage their advancement.

### **Importance of higher education for Toto communities**

“Toto” is a unique community in India and West Bengal (Paul, 2021). The language and culture of the Toto tribe are entirely different (Das & Subba, 2022). Totos are an indigenous, primitive tribe that is socially, economically, and educationally very backward compared to other communities. Their low educational attainment has disabled them (Dawn, 2014). Compared to other communities, the Toto community is less effective in education. This community’s members do not share the same levels of education, socioeconomic status, language, culture, occupation, health, family status, eating habits, Contemporary religion, and way of life. They maintain their cultural aspect. They are mainly less effective in education. Since education raises potential and improves the quality of life, it is generally believed to be essential to becoming a human resource. It is the primary means of empowering the less fortunate members of society and enables them to take an active role in social and political discussions (Das & Subba, 2022). Depending on education, the communities of the toto tribals will be developed (Chakrabarty & Sahu, 2013). Our present society depends on higher education, which makes people human resources. All education steps are the main instrument for civilizing the next production (Baloj, 2021). higher education will empower the tribal peoples and socio-economically make them very strong, which is very important for their update, and it will make them adapt to any other community culture and any other aspects.

By accepting higher education, they will be alert to how to lead life and how to develop their culture, and the higher-educated government employees will be role models for their society. Self-confidence will grow within the Toto community's people. They will believe that if any one of their communities takes proper higher education, they will be established as human resources.

### **An Overview of National Education Policy NEP 2020**

NEP 2020 gives more importance to equity and inclusion, which will change the Indian higher education system. NEP 2020 emphasizes the same rules for all students for enrollment in higher education to maintain equality and inclusion, which will contribute to the development of our nation and change the socio-cultural status. One of the most important aims of NEP 2020 is to enhance the enrollment of all communities, specifically the backward classes far from mainstream society. The motive is to increase the gross enrollment ratio (GER) in higher education to 50% by 2035, specifically emphasizing backward and Indigenous students.

NEP 2020 gives more importance to the enhancement of inclusive education and the assurance of the enrollment of people in tribal communities in high-quality education. This will be very helpful to the Toto tribal people who face many educational problems like- distance from their home to educational institutions, inappropriate transport, lack of consciousness, and different cultural aspects. According to NEP 2020, the curriculum content should be connected to the lifestyle of tribal peoples, such as the Toto tribes. They will easily understand the content of the curriculum and apply it in their professional lives, as well as many other skills they will adopt. Moreover, it emphasizes the need for vocational education and early skill development. Early skill development and vocational education are also given a lot of weight. Giving tribal youth, including those from the Toto tribe, the necessary skills for employment and business may benefit them.

### **Literature review and Rationale of the study**

Toto communities and higher education have various aspects, each of which has been examined by researchers of their point of view. (Debnath, et al., 2021) Indicate that Most of them remain illiterate. (Das & Subba, 2022) found the vast majority of Totos lack literacy, and there is a gender disparity in the subject area of schooling, with a greater number of male than female Toto participants. (Chandel, et al., 2023) Indicate that the enrollment number in higher education of ST students is still relatively low. (Paul, 2021) discovered that the degree of involvement of Toto’s children in education is really low. (Jamal, et al., 2021) Determined that raising the level of knowledge and awareness through seminars, workshops, films, camps, public gatherings, talks, debates, rallies, and cultural events would be crucial in halting the area's inhabitants and would promote their long-term growth and progress.

Even with certain conclusions about the status of higher education, its challenges, and the government’s effort to improve the Toto Tribal Community’s higher education, it is believed that this will provide a very beneficial perspective for educational study.

### **Methodology**

Most of the data used in this study are secondary, with additional data coming from various books, such as the District Census Handbook, journals, newspapers, websites, publications, and other sources. This study’s technique is based on documentary analysis. An inference was made after the secondary data that was currently available was processed and examined.

### **Government Initiatives and Policies for Toto Tribe in Higher Education**

To improve the higher educational standing of Toto tribal villages, the government has launched several Initiatives and Policies to encourage higher education in these areas. The programs are –

- i. Formation of Educational Institutions**  
Primary and secondary schools are formed in Toto para, so Toto tribal students can easily access education from their nearby locality.
- ii. Specialized Support Centers**  
The Toto community students are weaker in academic areas than the other community students, so some specialized support centers help the Toto tribal students with academic purposes for higher education, give some suggestions for further education, and try to solve the problems of Toto tribal students so they can continue their higher education.
- iii. Programs for Skill Development**  
The government prioritizes skill development projects specifically designed to meet the requirements of Toto tribe communities, in addition to standard higher education initiatives. These initiatives improve Indigenous youth's employability and entrepreneurial potential by providing them with training in practical skills and vocational areas. To increase the availability and caliber of higher education for India's tribal groups, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MOTA) has started several higher education projects (Chandel, et al., 2023). An additional government endeavor is the Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA), designed to assist universities in raising the standard of their curricula and research.
- iv. Infrastructure Development**  
The government makes investments in Toto tribal communities' infrastructure development initiatives, which include building classrooms, libraries, and computer laboratories. Better infrastructure makes it easier for Indigenous people to access educational resources and creates better learning settings.
- v. Scholarship Programs**  
The government has launched several scholarship programs to help tribal students who want to pursue higher education. By helping students financially and easing their financial load, these scholarships aim to motivate students to pursue their academic objectives.
- vi. Reservation Policies**  
To guarantee that a specific proportion of seats are set aside for students from tribal communities, the government has imposed reservation policies at educational institutions. This effort aims to alleviate the historical difficulties that Indigenous people have endured and to support equitable access to higher education. The Totos' Government Initiatives the Backward Classes Welfare Department of the Government of West Bengal has chosen to employ the first male and female graduate from the endangered Toto Tribe as a social worker, per the State Government's decision. Additionally, the Totos are given employment in the nearby Grameen Bank and tea gardens. Government initiatives, including scholarships and reservation policies, endeavor to foster higher education among the Toto tribes. Under Article 285, financial assistance is provided by the Centre to the state government for the betterment of PVTG,

These programs work to close the educational gap, give higher education to Toto native groups, and support their overall growth and assimilation into mainstream society.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### **Analysis of the current condition of the Toto Tribes in higher education**

The Toto tribal students do not understand the material well because of their inadequate elementary education, and these issues carry over into their higher education. As a result, they become disinterested in attending classes and continuing their higher education. The higher education status of the tribal students is very low. Toto's younger generation is involved in higher education, and they have a somewhat higher educational standing than the older generation. Among the third generation, 2 out of 50 had completed higher secondary education (Das, & Subba, 2022).

In this situation, the number who have completed their Bachelor degree and some of them have completed their master's degrees has increased. Rita Toto was the first woman to graduate from Totopara, which now boasts 18 graduates (11 male, 7 female). The community is incredibly proud of Dhananjay Toto, who holds a master's degree. Some of the Toto communities people get jobs under the West Bengal government and central government; the first graduate from the Toto community is Sanjib Toto (46), a welfare inspector for the government of West Bengal who works with the underprivileged sections, Rita Toto is the first woman to graduate in Totopara; now she works at the welfare office at Toto Para, Bhakta Toto, a soldier in the Indian army (Chakraborty, 2022). some of the Toto community people are involved in govt jobs like Kaliprasad Toto - A primary school Teacher; Suchana Toto – A primary school Teacher; Sugrib Toto – Bank sub staff; Bhakta Toto- Gramin bank manager; and others are involved as Clerks, Librarian; and police.

However, there are comparatively very few people with higher levels of education in the other community. Who possess advanced degrees yet are unemployed. According to most of Totopara's educated youth, having a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) status hinders their employment. Their lack of employment and idleness have made many of them increasingly

disinterested in pursuing their studies. Approximately 50 to 75 Toto teenagers who could not find employment in their district or village are now employed as migrant laborers in Sikkim and Bhutan.

Their higher education institute is far from their house: Birpara College is 30 Km away, and Jaigaon College is 34 Km away. Therefore, they face many problems in accessing higher education. On the way to Toto Para, there are six streams to cross, both large and small. All villages are abandoned during the monsoon season, so they cannot travel to others from their village. (Sinha, 2023) indicates that the Toto community is among the more disadvantaged communities in the Dooars.

### **Socio-economic challenges of Toto tribes in higher education**

There are many socioeconomic challenges to higher education for the Toto tribes for higher education. This are-

#### **The absence of infrastructure**

The Toto's lack of numerous amenities caused them to live in social isolation, which prevented them from participating in higher education. The research area and the nearby community are separated during the wet season. The rain never stops, making the route extremely hazardous.

#### **Distance to their higher education institution**

Their house, Toto Para, situated on the Indo-Bhutan border, Totopara is 20 km from the closest town, Madarihat (Chakraborty, S., 2022). There are six riverbeds that, because they are dry in the months before winter, serve as roadways that must be crossed to get to the town. Going from Madarihaat to Totopara takes more than an hour and a half because there aren't many routes. Due to the water in the streams, this road is closed in multiple locations during the wet season. This path passes through Jaldapara National Park as well. Therefore, it's not uncommon to see wild creatures like bison and wild elephants. Since the alternate woodland route passes through the forest's core zone, it cannot be used for the voyage. However, Totos also mentions that the NH34C is located within the core zone. However, no road is being built to link Totopara with the closest town. Regarding the deficiency of infrastructure, the administration has spoken very little. So, distance is a very important challenge for Toto tribal people in higher education.

#### **Socio-economic regression characterizes most of them**

Due to their extremely low socioeconomic status and reticent culture, they could not integrate into other communities or close the door to higher education.

#### **Lack of awareness**

The literacy rate in the research area is relatively low. Simply said, it's due to ignorance. Toto communities are unaware of the importance of higher education, which makes them economically and educationally very empowered and strong. The literacy rate of men is better than that of women.

#### **A higher rate of dependency**

Women participate in the workforce at a relatively lower rate than men because they are very dependent on men. As a result, they are unable to pursue higher education.

#### **Poverty**

Toto's people are so poor that they do not desire to spare their children or their labor power and allow them to attend schools. The Toto students' fathers and mothers are not interested in their children going to higher education institutions because they believe that when they receive education, their children cannot find money immediately. Hence, they were unable to pursue further schooling. Toto's have very little income and are economically very underdeveloped. Despite their inability to pay for it, they recognize the advantages of education. Spending on education is really low. They invest fewer financial resources in their schooling.

#### **Inadequate transportation and communication systems**

The study area's inadequate transportation and communication systems make it extremely difficult for the entire Toto population to travel to the nearest town for educational purposes. Even though the private bus owner still has permission, the bus route from Madarihat to Totopara was closed. Due to the water in the streams, this road is closed in multiple locations during the wet season. Hence, it is a challenge for higher education.

#### **Language**

Since their mother tongue is entirely different, one of the most significant barriers to the Toto tribal children from attending school is language. As a result, it is exceedingly difficult for them to understand Bengali, the language of teaching. Consequently, they were unable to engage in higher education properly.

### **Recommendations for Policy and Practice and Betterment for Higher Education**

To reduce Totos' issues, future advancements might need to take the advice below:

- a) Improved infrastructure, infrastructure development projects, including the construction of educational facilities, the appointment of local teachers, libraries, and skill development centers, high-quality roads, and the government could ensure that the NH 31C is available for Totos in Toto-dominated areas, can greatly improve Toto tribe youth's access to high-quality higher education. For example, more buses between Toto Para and Madarihat are needed so that people can travel to the closest town anytime to receive high-quality education, which will help them pursue higher education.



- b) Promoting the collection of forest produce by guaranteeing a minimum support price and market integration will economically help the Toto student's family pursue higher education.
- c) Women's levels of education in the studied area are significantly lower than men's. The government should take all necessary measures to promote female literacy through appointment of female teachers and awareness campaigns because mothers are their children's first teachers.
- d) One instance of a government project that targets the Toto tribe in India, specifically about higher education, is the creation of financial support or scholarship programs. These scholarships can assist with living costs, educational costs, and other college or university-related fees.
- e) The government can work with colleges and other educational establishments to set aside seats or quotas for Toto students in various undergraduate and post-graduate programs. This guarantees Toto tribe youngsters better access to possibilities for higher education.
- f) The government may also conduct targeted outreach initiatives to raise Toto community members' knowledge of postsecondary education and career prospects. These initiatives could include workshops, provide proper guidance and career counseling sessions, and mentorship programs explicitly designed with Toto's needs and obstacles in mind.

All things considered, a comprehensive strategy that includes funding, promoting female literacy rates, the appointment of local teachers and female teachers, scholarship programs, reserved seats, outreach initiatives, and infrastructure development can effectively encourage the Toto tribe people to pursue higher education.

### Conclusion

Societal awareness and the support of different non-governmental organizations are essential for reducing issues and promoting Totos' overall growth (Debnath, et al., 2021). In education research, there is a gender disparity as more male Totos than female Totos participate. The government ought to implement diverse approaches to mitigate issues; moreover, societal consciousness and the support of different social associations are indispensable for mitigating troubles and promoting the overall advancement of Totos. Of these, the state government and non-governmental groups are currently striving to improve the areas of health and education, which are considered to be key indicators of human progress despite their historically low levels. The government has made several attempts to raise the literacy rate, particularly among female Totos. They had previously experienced population decline, but after consistent efforts to enhance their well-being and shield them from deadly illnesses, they have now experienced a slight increase in population, which has proven to be a glimmer of hope. Therefore, it is now necessary to give Toto's education and inclusive growth some serious thought. Therefore, to solve this issue and increase the amount of money allotted for Toto's education in the federal and state budgets, planners, policymakers, and other government initiatives are desperately needed. The children of the Totos should have easy access to and greater possibilities to integrate them into the mainstream of economic progress. In comparison to past generations, the percentage of persons with higher education has slightly improved, but it still needs to climb as society and education become more developed. The rate of literacy is exceedingly low, especially for women. The government must take significant action to eliminate the issues facing Toto tribes in higher education; else, they will go extinct.

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