

# A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF CHANGING ARCHITECTURE, IDENTITY AND DWELLING PATTERNS OF THE TOTO COMMUNITY IN WEST BENGAL

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## Abstract

*The research is anthropological in the sense that it highlights the changes which crept into Toto architecture, society and culture studied on a case of study: Totos of Totopara as one among India's smallest primitive vulnerable tribal groups. The study traces the changing landscape as traditional bamboo and thatch huts evolve into modern pucca structures, using anthropological fieldwork, interviews and spatial mapping. It examines the virtues and defects of vernacular architecture, explains the ecological and symbolic reasons for houses' shapes, sizes and floor details; describes their construction as well as what social, economic governmental or environmental factors are gonna change them. The study also refers to the evolving attitudes toward vernacular heritage among younger people. It's also a story of cultural loss and a heightened consciousness of the need to conserve that culture. The study increases the understanding of how architecture works as a dynamic expression of identity, acculturation and tradition in small ethno-cultural groups.*

## Introduction

Anthropologists have long argued that even a single leaf thatched-roof hut is also a matter of study, an architectural masterpiece and a “quanta” of wisdom because tribal huts are an epitome of indigenous knowledge gathered from nature, selected and repeatedly examined under harsh circumstances. “ In the native context, architecture is vernacular when it exhibits distinct characteristics in construction techniques, material use, and spatial concept within a socio-cultural construct of a particular community to sustain.”(Monzur & Jany, 2022) Ethnic groups of various backgrounds have lifestyles closely linked to their tradition, and their cultural ties are spontaneously expressed through vernacular architecture (Dowsett, 1987). The art, architecture, and tradition of these groups are a great indigenous vernacular expression of the tribal people who have, through their efforts over centuries, created distinct built environments that reflect an evolved response to geography, climate, distribution of ethnic people, and sustainable habitats (Renping & Zhenyu, 2006). Thus, the dwellings of a tribe's men are not studied from an architectural perspective, but they act as a lens through which the holistic approaches of the society can be explored. Where the word “holistic” encompasses the vocabulary, resource management, rituals, customs, and other cultural instruments that bind them together.

India, an anthropological museum, provides several examples where the habitat structures demonstrate this holistic approach. Among them, the Toto tribe of West Bengal carries a legacy of wisdom that is still visible in their unique dwelling patterns. These houses represent a cultural legacy that has enabled survival across generations and serve as a living testament to the community's resilience, resource management, and sense of identity in the face of external cultural influences.

Toto tribes are constitutionally a PVTG (Primitive Vulnerable Tribe Group) and ethnographically Mongoloid group by origin. Once, they were the smallest tribe in the world, living in Totopara (or “Totbiko loi” in the Toto Language). In the last century, they were nearly extinct, with only 321 individuals in 69 houses, according to the 1951 census. However, community members steadily increased after the government and NGOs took different measures to protect them and their interests. In 2025, 1652 totos in 410 families (BCW department, August 2025) reside at Totopara. The Toto people claimed that, except for Totopara, they cannot be found in the rest of the world (Barman, 1955). Now, members of the Toto tribes, either for service, education, or marital Purposes, are starting to reside outside of Toto Para individually. However, there was indeed no Toto society in the world except Totopara. Being a hunting-gathering community, Totos were traditionally deeply dependent on the forest and its natural resources for substances, from dwellings to food. In the middle of the last century, it is documented that they had learned Agriculture and the uses of the plough (Barman,1955). The Toto community communicates with each other in their native Toto language, an endangered language that was once an oral language with no written script. In 2023, the Toto Script was introduced.

In the past, Totos were reluctant to embrace any kind of social change in the context of the modern, techno-centric economic development. Instead, they were content with adhering to their longstanding customs, socio-cultural practices, and traditional way of life. However, there has been a noticeable shift in the Toto tribal group recently, especially about the younger generation's views on modern, techno-centric economic development. The distinctive characteristics of their culture and ethnicity have also been profoundly impacted by globalisation (Bhattacharya,2023). Recent research on the changing dynamics of socio-economic and cultural conditions has revealed that the Toto tribe is no longer conservative and resistant to change; their views have grown comparatively liberal to accommodate holistic development in their land by applying available modern knowledge. The economic revolution, migration of Nepalese, Biharis, and Bengalees, and the abundance of digital social media have all strongly influenced society. The century-old traditional society is currently being swept up in the tide of accumulation. Consequently, maintaining Toto's hallmark culture, dress, language, rituals, and the Toto tribal ethnicity as a whole has been standing in front of a crucial challenge. As a result, the Toto community appears to have struggled to maintain its hallmark tribal culture and ethnicity, even in its motherland (Bhattacharya et al., 2023). However, this transformation has forced them to undergo a paradigm shift in their cultural identity and societal beliefs. Therefore, against this background, the present study aims to document and analyse the architectural heritage of the Toto community, with particular attention to indigenous terminology, cultural significance, and the socio-economic factors driving change. By situating field observations within broader anthropological discussions on cultural continuity, transformation, and sustainability, the study aims to contribute to the preservation of heritage and understanding how a nature-aligned community, which balances tradition with modernity, operates in the era of globalisation.

**Objectives of the study:** The following study was comprehensively conducted with the following objectives.

1. To document the architectural creativity of the Toto community.
2. To record indigenous terminology and materials used in house construction.
3. To analyse the merits and demerits of Toto's vernacular architectural patterns.
4. To study and evaluate the key economic and social factors that bring about these drastic changes from unique cultural traditional houses to typical pucca houses.
5. To study and evaluate the interest of the younger Toto community in their old traditional architecture.

## Hypothesis:

1. The Toto houses are not only a symbol of Architecture, but also an example of a concept where people can coexist in harsh natural conditions by mutually sharing labour and resources. Where no money exchange is not mandatory.
2. Strong forces of outside culture's parameters insist that a stagnant group preserve its cultural heritage and remain part of its own culture.

### Importance and scope of the study:

1. The Toto community is under transformation. Recently, their socio-cultural and economic activities have been challenged due to the influences of the rapidly changing environment around them. The Totopara tribes depended on their prehistoric means of subsistence, but social changes have forced them to deviate from their traditional ways of life. (D. bhattacharya 2023). Thus, it should be a natural expression of a concerned society to protect the legacy. The conservation is not just for securing heritage but also for protecting a symbol of the journey of the human species. The symbol which will be always remind us who we were, and beside the complexities of modern day problems the token of simplicity will be inspired the civilisation that how easy and simple kind of life can a man lead, ofcourse a survival rate of whole humankind will be increased by enriching the the new ideas of surviving in the midst of the forest with out the touch of any kind of modern facilities.
2. The project has some social significance, too. When the project collected the natural significance of the architecture, they expressed their pride in being a member of this community. This kind of thing is essential for the community in the present era. If anybody does not know the prestigious value of his culture, he may leave it to follow another one, which he thinks is more prestigious than the previous one. Alternatively, he humiliates his own culture to prove himself superior to other members of society. Thus, this study helps them remember the ethnicity of their glorious past and inspires them to pass it on to the next generation.
3. The project also has a symbiotic social contribution. Where the word 'us' broadly means the non-totos. This means this study enriched a member's identity as Toto and enriched the non-Toto society with an idea of how a common share of labour and resources can cause the society's sustainability. Thus, protecting huts or traditional houses of Totos symbolises conservation heritage and protects a chapter of humankind's journey.

### Methodology:

The basic frame of the study is structured upon a qualitative ethnographic approach, an extensive literature survey, participant observation, oral history collection, field interviews, and collection of particulars with members of the Toto community. Data used for empirical analysis was collected in different villages of TOTOPARA, like Poargaon, Puja Gaon, Hospital Line (previously Panchayat Gaon), Dhumasi Gaon and Chamba Line through extended engagement with households, elders, and younger community members to record architectural practices, different terminology, and perceptions of traditional versus pucca housing. Literature survey data have been collected from the Community Development Office, Backwards Classes Welfare Department, Govt. of West Bengal, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Govt. of India, Anthropological Survey of India, Govt. Library of TOTOPARA and other Govt. reports.

The researcher's positionality is relevant in this context. As project director and curator of the Totopara Museum under the Aariyom Fundamental Research Institute and director of social work with the Aariyom Foundation, the researcher had prolonged interaction with the community over the past five years. These roles facilitated access to narratives, archival materials, and local perspectives, which enriched the study. At the same time, the analysis has been conducted with attention to academic neutrality, ensuring that personal involvement complements rather than substitutes for rigorous ethnographic inquiry.

### Field Study and data collection:

During the field study, preference was given to community leaders, elders, and practitioners of traditional knowledge. Several eminent personalities from the Toto community were interviewed, including Padma Shri awardee Shri Dhaniram Toto, Shri Bhakta Toto (the first bank manager of the community), Shri Bhim Toto (the first Army service holder), Shri Sanjib Toto (the first graduate), the current *Kaiji* (village head) Shri Indrajit Toto, *Pow* (priest) Shri Kalicharan Toto, and cultural enthusiast Shri Darjee Toto. Alongside these, 50 community members were interviewed (30 men and 20 women). Respondents were selected using purposive and snowball sampling to ensure representation of knowledge-holders and general households' experience.

All participants were informed in detail about the purpose and scope of the study, and oral consent was taken before the interviews or unofficial group discussions. Ethical principles of confidentiality, voluntary participation, and cultural sensitivity were maintained throughout the fieldwork.

A museum - "Aariyom Village culture conservation and research centre" has been created for the community in the village to archive and protect the materials found during the field survey. The museum continuously encourages community members to gather their own cultural items to showcase the cultural prestige of the Toto community to the outside world.

### Review of existing literature:

Studies of vernacular architecture have been emphasised for a long time - and continue to be so - that this art form reflects social organisation, cultural beliefs, and environmental adaptation. Early anthropological studies of Toto, by B.K. Roy Burman's accounts of the Totos pointed out that tribal housing was not only functional but also ideological. The worldview expressed by living, ritual, and ecology came together (Burman 1956). Including him, Later papers, such as some of A. Das (1969) and Charu Chandra Sanyal's study on sacred architecture, the Demsha. They also set both a divine centre and a model for domestic housing. A common thread runs through these stories of Toto homes as embodied places at the intersection of divinity and everyday life.

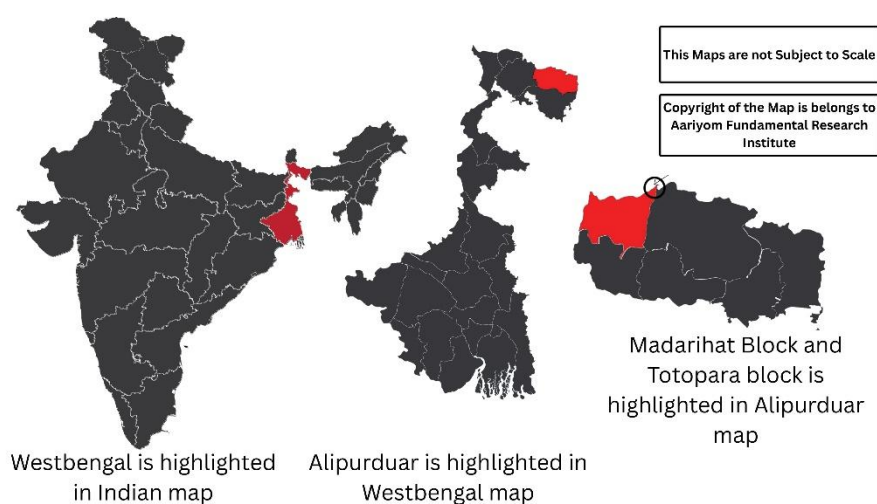
Literature records the decline of traditional housing, which is also caused by modernity, fewer resources, and government action. Amal Kumar Das (1955) documented the earliest government assistance for housing granted to the Totos. He noted how financial help frequently inspired for hybrid or non-traditional dwelling forms. Bimalendu Majumder, Jharna Basu and Rimi Dutta like researchers have huge archival and pictorial records from 1986 to 2014 to show how influences have

changed the construction method. For example, corrugated sheets have replaced thatch roofing, and bamboo has become a permanent building material. These narratives illustrate how economic policy and external influences affect architectural transformation while simultaneously declining symbolic continuity.

At the same time, research on vernacular architecture focuses on how traditional forms are ecologically non-disturbed. V.S. Pramar (1989) stated that buildings constructed from bamboo, grass, and mud were primitive but ecologically sustainable constructions with moderated temperature and comparatively less erosion. Similar arguments are present in the literature on environmental anthropology, which underscores how the depletion of resource diversity (bamboo and thatching grass in Totopara) impacts traditional construction processes.

Recent research emphasises youthful ambitions and generational transition. Studies on the Particular Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in West Bengal indicate that younger individuals frequently interpret traditional dwellings as symbols of poverty. However, pucca housing is interpreted as a sign of prosperity (Bhattacharya 2018). While some educated elites and others, on the other hand, want cultural centres or museums to safeguard architectural heritage. This conflict illustrates international discussions over cultural sustainability, particularly how contemporary cultures integrate the pursuit of modernisation with the necessity of protecting intangible heritage (Logan 2002).

The data already there makes three important points for the study. Tribal housing is part of a natural system that includes native divinity, rituals, and environmental adaptation. So, a change in housing is a sign of more profound cultural changes. Second, outside help, such as government initiatives, a lack of resources, or trade with nearby groups, sped up the collapse of traditional forms. Third, discussions about identity and legacy show vernacular houses as more than just places to live; they are also physical representations of cultural memory that may be used again, which means that people want both physical support and social recognition. Where early ethnographers have documented Toto's architectural knowledge, limited information exists regarding the influence of current socio-economic transformations, the standpoints of younger generations, and institutional conservation efforts (exemplified by community museums) or the potential future of these traditional practices. This study is significant since it surveys and analyses the continuities and disruptions within the Toto housing culture.



*Position of Totopara in India Map*

## 2. The study area:

### 2.1 Geography and climate:

Totopara is situated in the Alipurduar district of West Bengal, under the Madarihat block. According to its geographical coordinates, Totopara is located at 80°20' East longitude and 20°50' North latitude. The total area of Totopara spans 1,996.96 acres. It lies at an elevation ranging from 750 feet to 2600 feet above sea level. The land is slightly slanted from the western to the eastern part (Roy, 2018).

Bhutan and India, creating the international border also. In the local language, this mountain is known as "Hispa Pahar" or Kalishul Pahar. To the west, the area is bordered by marshlands, while the Torsa River defines the eastern boundary of Totopara.

Totopara experiences a pleasant yet distinct climate with significant seasonal variations. During summer (March to September), temperatures range from 22°C to 39°C, while in winter (October to February), they drop to 14°C to 22°C. The region experiences heavy rainfall from March to September, while the remaining six months remain extremely dry, causing grasslands to wither and soil to crack. Despite these fluctuations, Totopara's consistent wind flow ensures a comfortable living environment. (meteorological dept.)



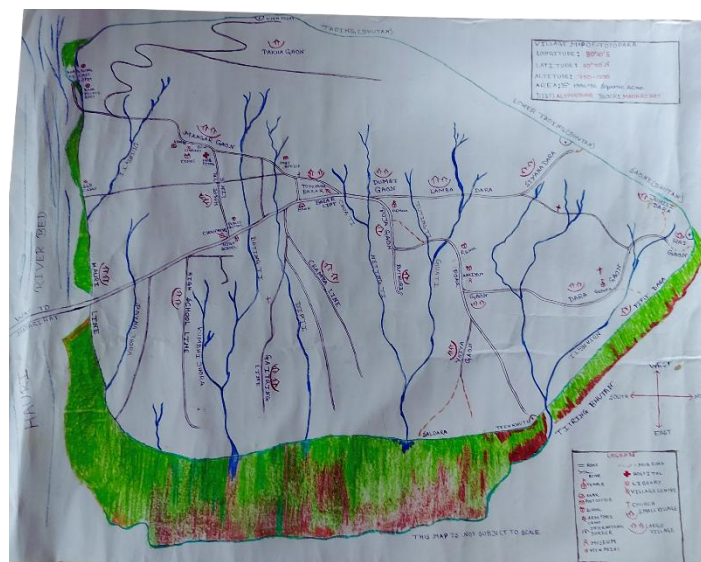


Figure 1 Map of Totopara

### 3. Socio-Cultural & Linguistic Context of the Toto Community:

#### Constitutional identity:

The Totos are one of the Primitive Vulnerable Tribe Groups (PVTG) among the other 2 in West Bengal (birhour and Lodha) and 75 in the country. In a definition, the government of India clarified the term PVTG as a pre-agricultural system of existence, that is, the practice of hunting and gathering, zero or negative population growth, and extremely low literacy levels compared with other tribal groups. The name of the Toto tribe was not included in the list of scheduled tribes (ST) in the first 'Constitution Order, 1950'. They came to be considered by the Union Government as a scheduled tribe community for the first time on 29th October 1956. In the year 1975, the Government of India, by an official announcement, declared them as the Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs), which were renamed as the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in the year 2006. (Bhattachaya) .

#### Society, culture, and language:

The origin of the Toto tribe is still a mystery. In 1889, D. Saunders, a surveyor of the East India Company, came here and discovered that a unique tribal society had evolved at totopara. They do not recall when they were here at Totopara. By researching their folk tales, B.Majumder told that maybe they came as an escapist group from the kingdom of royal Bhutan (Majumder, 1991). In contrast, the barman stated that the kingdom had imposed on them as porters to carry resources in the hilly terrain. Thus, there is a vast space to research this fact (Barman, 1956). Their origin is relevant because it can play a key role in discovering why they must depend on the forest. However, they are not the son of this land, how a completely different culture has evolved, and why they became dependent on forest sources to set up everything from their houses to food and culture. Rather, commerce with neighbouring groups. Have they hidden themselves inside the forest? Or forced to lose connection with the rest of the world?

The Toto community communicates among themselves in their native Toto language, which was once an oral language with no written script. However, Shri Dhaniram Toto has developed a unique script for the Toto language,. In toto language, "Sha" means house. As explained by Dhaniram Toto during an interview (personal communication, June 2024), the shape of the letter to express the sound "S" in the Toto Script is conceptualised by him from the word "Sha", which means house. Illustrates how architecture and language are interwoven in their cultural consciousness.

The Toto community has traditionally depended on the forest and its natural resources for sustenance. In earlier times, hunting was their primary means of survival, along with collecting and consuming wild fruits, roots or creepers. Venturing into the jungle to gather food was known as "Chungchu-Hawa." Even today, their cooking style remains simple, with minimal oil and spices. Eu is the traditional alcoholic drink of the Toto community, playing a crucial role in their every rituals and customs. Even the rituals of constructing new houses are not completed without Eu. Both men and women enjoy this beverage without restriction. It is primarily brewed from Marua (finger millet), which they produce by themselves. Besides the Eu, Smoking is a frequent practice in the Toto community.

In a focus group discussion with elder members of Totopara (field interview, June 2024), it was noted that in the 50's of the last century, Bamboo played a key role in the Toto Community. Even without earthen pots, they cooked rice and meat inside raw bamboo tubes placed over fire. Without pipes or buckets, bamboo stems carry water, essential household articles such as baskets, mats, and winnowing trays. It proves that even without contact with the rest of the world, the Toto people built a parallel civilisation entirely dependent on forest resources. However, due to the abundance of Plastic and other metal objects, the use of bamboo has become less common (Author's field notes: Totopara, January–June 2024). That is why, today, it is a matter of concern for the uniqueness of society, which is diminishing daily.

There are basically three types of houses in Totopara. Nai ko sha, Tong sha, and dem sha. Nai ko sha is the personal house, where Tong sha is the farm house, and the dem-sha is the sacred house of the Toto community, which serves as the cultural and spiritual hub of the community. During the annual festivals, men, women, and young girls gather here, filling the air

with songs and dances. The Demsha cultural temple has two Sacred drums, Chigaimu & Mugaimu (Majumdar, 1991), which are considered deities to the totos. Thus, Demsha is also relevant to the study, as it depicts physical shelters and cultural stages where their identity is practised and reformed.

Thus, taking together the constitutional status, language, religious practices, and dependency on forest resources creates an indispensable platform for understanding Toto dwellings. As modern influences—such as migration, housing subsidies, and digital culture—reshape community life, their housing traditions also evolve. The following section introduces household-level field data, exploring how socio-cultural forces manifest in the formation and changing of dwelling forms and spatial arrangements.

### **Settlement pattern, Types, Philosophy, and house form and layout:-**

#### **Settlement pattern:**

Various officials surveyed the entire area of Totopara at different times. The most recent substantial survey was the Census Survey 1951 conducted by the Government of India, which recorded the village area as 1996.96 acres. Before 1968, a total of 1996.96 acres of land was registered under the name of the late Dhonopoti Toto, the headman of Toto. In 1968, during the land reform in West Bengal, just 346.25 acres were allocated to 89 Toto households, with each land registered under individual names. The remaining land was declared vested by the Government.

Therefore, though Whole totopara is distributed in 14 hamlets- Chamba Line, Gaitring line, Hauri line, Dara Gaon, Bazar Line, Hospital Line, Pankha Gaon, Mangar Gaon, Juhili Danra, Pooja Gaon, Lamba Danra, Simana Danra, Powar Gaon, Rai Gaon, Subba Gaon, Mitrang Gaon, Dhumsi Gaon, but the residences of toto people are observed in only five villages. They are named Dhumci gaon, Puja gaon, Mitrang Gaon, Subba gaon and Mandal gaon. Subba Gaon itself encompasses Bazar Line, Chamba Line, and Gaitring Line. At the same time, Mandal Gaon covers Hauri Line, High School Line, and Hospital Line. Puja Gaon includes the Poargaon and Dhumci gaon, which consist of Lamba danra. As population pressure has increased, extensions of these villages have begun to emerge, but many are yet to receive formal recognition in government records (Author's field notes, Totopara, Jan–June 2024).

There are now different villages that are exposed in Totopara due to the presence of other migrant groups, but there are either no Totos residing or very few Totos reside. Like the Mangar gaon, Simana dara, Dara gaon, and Rai gaon, there is no Toto habitat; only Nepalis reside there. The Bazaar line or the totopara bazar (a part of former subba Gaon) is a habitat of migrants- Bihari, Nepali, and Bengali people- who reside here along with the toto dwellers. Poargaon and Lamba Dara have evolved into a community where Nepalese and totos families reside together,

A particularly notable development is the formation of a new hamlet, Yawya Gaon, on the boundary of Powar Gaon. Most of its residents are Totos, relocated from Dhumsi Gaon and Mitrang Gaon due to population pressure and land erosion. However, since this settlement is still in its early stages, it is not officially recognised, and census records continue to list its residents under their original villages.

Thus, while government statistics and institutional reports generally mention the “five main Toto villages,” on-ground reality reveals a more complex settlement pattern shaped by demographic growth, land scarcity, and in-migration.

Now focused on the study area where the Toto's reside:

Dhumchi Gaon, the oldest settlement of the Totos, beside the Guati River, is located on the slope of Tading Hill. The northernmost area of the settlement was designated as Dhumci gaon. The Dhumchi Gaon portion of the village Totopara is situated at the highest altitude compared to other community segments. The whole area was 275 acres (Dutta 2014). The residences located in Dhumchi gaon were unevenly dispersed.

The Mitran Gaon part of Totopara village is located to the west and is named after veteran Mitrang Toto. The total area of Mitran Gaon is around 200 acres (Dutta 2014). In the Mitran Gaon section of Totopara village, all the residences were built on tiered stairs on the hillside. The village can be described as having a zigzag configuration. The primary route to Mitran Gaon is pebbled, whereas the remaining interconnected roads are not paved with concrete. All the residences in Mitran Gaon were poorly distributed.

The Puja Gaon part of Totopara village was located in the northeast direction. The Puja Gaon portion of the village gets its name from the sacred site, Demsha. The overall area was around 450 acres (Dutta 2014). The roadways were constructed of concrete. Houses were discovered situated on both sides of the road. There was one CDS centre and one primary school, Aariyom Muktaram Toto Memorial School. A museum called “Aariyom Village Culture Conservation and Research Centre”, which focuses on the conservation and research of the authentic culture of Totopara village, is located there.

Mondal Gaon was located to the south. The overall size of Mondal gaon is around 175 acres (Dutta 2014). The village's name originated from the tax collector and the social head of the former Toto society, Mandal or Gappu, who resided here. All the residences in Mondal Gaon were systematically aligned on either side of the major road. The primary road of Mondal Gaon was constructed of concrete.

The Panchayat Gaon was likewise located in the southern direction and named because the formal Panchayat resided here. The overall size of Panchayat gaon is around 550 acres (Dutta 2014). The Panchayat gaon constituted the most densely populated portion of Totopara village. All the residences in Panchayat gaon were organised linearly on both sides of the road. The primary thoroughfare was constructed of concrete. The Panchayat gaon had a Primary Health Centre, Totopara Welfare Centre, a Government Primary School, Chittaranjan Toto Memorial School, and a public library.

Subba Gaon occupied the central portion of the hamlet. Here, the rituals and customs head of the Toto community, named “Kaiji”, resided. The whole area of Subba Gaon was around 320 acres (Dutta 2014). This section concluded with agricultural land. The residences of Subba Gaon were aligned linearly on either side of the road. The primary route to

Subba Gaon was paved with concrete, whereas the remaining roads were not. The Main Totopara bazaar area, government bank, and bus stop are located here.

## DISTRIBUTION OF THE POPULATION ACCORDING TO VILLAGES

### LIST 1:

| Name of the village | Family | Population |
|---------------------|--------|------------|
| Dhumci Gaon         | 44     | 179        |
| Puja Gaon           | 31     | 268        |
| Subba gaon          | 99     | 341        |
| Mondal gaon         | 34     | 119        |
| Mitrang gaon        | 42     | 171        |
| Panchayat Gaon      | 160    | 574        |
| total               | 444    | 1652       |

\*data as per 31st August 2025 provided by BCW department, Totopara

### Types of houses:

There are three types of Houses observed in Totopara. i) Demsha - the worshipping place ii) Nai ko sha - personal house iii) Tong sha farm house. Let us discuss in Depth their past Architectural patterns, current status, and their contribution to Toto society.

But in this Present literature we shall abstain from the discussion of Demsha, as the Demsha the social gathering, and religious Practice place a more over a Common property of the Society, therefore, evolution of this construction has a completely separate basis on economical, social and Cultural background.

### Nai-ko-sha or the typical residential houses:

#### Philosophical perspective of the house:

There is an oral narrative that the Toto tribe first learned to build houses by observing the nest of the *oja* bird (Blue whistling thrush- *Myophonus caeruleus*). In the forest, the bird would make a beautiful nest. It was built with small sticks, raised double-sloped, and covered with wild leaves. It would place a few sticks evenly in front, which we call a Balcony in modern terms. The oja bird would first perch on the veranda before entering its nest. Likewise, when leaving, it would step onto the veranda before flying away (Dhaniram Toto, Personal interview, 14 November 2024).

### Direction of the house:

The faces of the traditional houses were also concerned. At first, the faces of the South have been determined. The Toto house faced south. All Toto houses are constructed either south-facing or east-facing. If a house he constructed facing north, Ispha would consider it an affront. Ispha lives in the north. Ispha is the good occurring god for the Toto community. Hispa is a hill situated at the India-Bhutan border, presently in Bhutan's land territory. Again, in the west lives Pideoa. The evil god of the tolos. Again, he was symbolised with a particular hill at the India-Bhutan international border, and it is said that he roams in the midst of the forest with his companions and always plans to harm people. Thus, Toto's houses cannot face the west to avoid disturbing him. (Barman 1956)

### Materials of the house:

To build a Toto house, *khayer* (*Senegalia catechu*) trees are used as pillars, *odla* (*Sterculia urens*) tree bark is used to make rope, and plenty of bamboo is needed. The walls and the floors of the house are made of split bamboo. Nails or bolts are not necessary. Nor is there any need for paid labour. The householder slowly collects all materials in advance. Once everything is ready, the news is spread in the village that the house will be built on a particular day. Barman noted that during the construction of a home near relatives, especially clan men and the sister's husband, they are expected to render free service. "Others may or may not be present, sister's husband must" (Barman 1956).

Shri Roy Barman noted Specific ideas among the tolos in the last century. They believe that if trees are used to make houses, then the tree's spirit will harm the households, as Most of the Totos believed that trees have spirits and they will



Flooring of the vernacular house



wall of the vernacular house



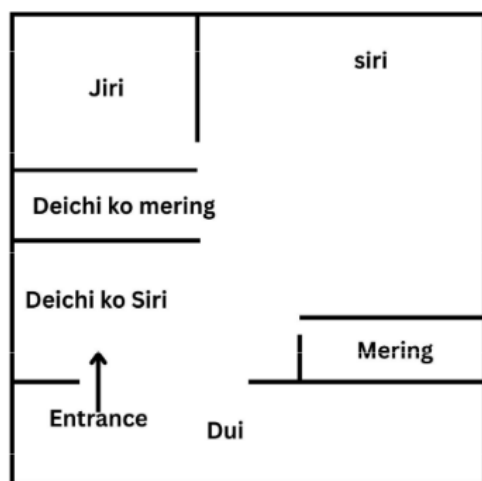


Figure the planning of the traditional house

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curse. Besides, the house owners thought they were habituated to the traditional houses. Thus, new dwellings will create extra headaches for them, which is naturally unexpected. **Planning of the houses:** The houses are built on wooden or bamboo posts about five to six feet off the ground (Das 1969). The roof is mostly two sloped and made of grass. Bamboo splits are tied together at intervals, and more bamboo splits are tied underneath to hold the thatch in place. Most huts have only one room, which is usually split into three parts: (i) Siri (the family's sleeping area), (ii) Daichiko-siri (the guests' sleeping area), and (iii) Jiri (the place of the household gods). In Siri and Daichiko-Siri, a separate cooking area called "merring." People who do not live in Jiri or Siri cannot go there or touch the mering. The room is usually 12 to 15 feet long and 8 to 10 feet wide. There is sometimes a little square window in one of the walls. The door that opens onto the bamboo platform is 4 to 5 feet high and 2 to 3 feet wide. The planned bamboo platform is about eight to ten feet wide and runs the whole length of the front. There is no latrine for them. They go to the bathroom through a hole in the floor on one side of the sleeping room. The pigs that live below eat the poop that falls to the ground, which makes them natural scavengers. An extra part of the house is called a "eote" or "iote." This part had been used for many things. People can use iote for jiri, the room where they pray, or siri, the room where they sleep (Barmam 1956).

### Rooms and their functions in detail:

**Jiri:** Jiri is the dedicated worship room of the Toto people at their home. No one except the male family members is allowed to enter the room of worship called "jiri", not even the adulterant women who do not have permission to enter the room. Clans have different totems. However, there are some distinct things in the "jiri"; a wooden log is cut in a particular pattern, approximately one foot long, half a foot wide, and 5-9 inches high. The khayer tree is mainly used to make the platform. Moreover, a pot of eu (alcohol of the Toto community) has been offered on the platform. The pot or cup is called as "papui". Traditionally, it was made with bamboo. (Kalicharan Toto, Personal interview, 14 November 2024).

**Dui:** The importance of "dui" or the open bamboo platform in front of the house is very much felt. It equally serves as a balcony and a meeting or dining place. Sometimes, it is said that the presence of a dui is a symbol of the degree of hospitality of the household. The absence of dui in front of any house symbolises the family's unsociable behaviour (Barman 1956).

**Daichiko- siri,** or the sleeping place of the guests, is one of the essential places of the Toto houses. The room is also used as the sleeping place of the adult female family members. Once the daughter became an adult, she would not sleep with his parents. Moreover, the Toto community possesses self-dignity for that(Barman 1956).

**Stool Passing Passage:** The passage of stool through the "hole" within the small intestine is considered a myth. Prof. B.K. Roy Barman has clarified that Toto acknowledges that their ancestors used to relieve themselves via a hole within the hut at night. However, they vehemently deny doing so. A. Das may be influenced by the narratives of the "Bharat Mahajati Mandali," as referenced by Barman, who states, "Furthermore, at night, in response to nature's call, they relieve themselves from a corner of their huts (a necessity due to the inherent dangers of venturing outside at night), while pigs serve as scavengers." Barman (1956) challenges prior assertions, indicating that external observers may have overstated these narratives.

### Construction of the house:

In a focus group discussion with elder members of Totopara (field interview, June 2024), some critical phases emerged. One person measures the four corners with a bamboo stick—no modern measuring tape was used. Basically, one hand length is taken as a unit. After measuring, circles are marked on the ground where the posts will be placed. At these spots, young and older women dig pits with iron spades, about two and a half to three feet deep. Due to a lack of iron instruments, bamboo was used to dig soil. One face of the bamboo is used to sharpen, and the other is used to dig. While the bamboo became short and hard to use, it was abandoned (Barman 1956).

Meanwhile, the boys prepare the posts and arrange them. Another group is used for splitting bamboo. Moreover, other groups are making ropes from the bark of the odla tree. As the men drop the posts into the pits, they shout together: "Te maroro heiso!" (a traditional shout in Toto language). During breaks, rice beer (eu) is served as a drink. With 30–40 people working together, the house is usually completed in a single day.

**Thatching of the Vernacular:** In a focus group discussion with elder members of Totopara (field interview, June 2024), the roof is generally two sloped and thatched with grass. The thatch is held by means of bamboo splits tied at intervals with similar bamboo splits underneath (Das 65). The thatch for the roof is collected from the Torsa River region. Different grasses are used:

1. Muimai – grows 3 to 4 feet tall.
2. Kasi – grows 5 to 6 feet tall.



3. *Panang* – grows on hill slopes, 7 to 8 feet tall, with flat leaves, but decays quickly, so the roof must be redone every year.
4. *Kabiowa* – also grows on slopes, soft and smooth, 4 to 5 feet tall. It can also be twisted into a rope. among all, the kasi or kash (*Saccharum spontaneum*) is identified by all rest of them even not identified most group members. **Figure:** thatching pattern of toto vernacular house



Figure thatching of the vernacular house

#### The rituals:

Once the house is complete, in the evening, an elderly Toto priest (local name Pao) comes with *haria* and chants mantras dedicated to the household deity “Swadhin Pa,” or “Shadingpa” According to the priest’s instructions, after recitation, the offering is made. A pig is sacrificed, and its blood is offered at the base of the four corner pillars of the house. Later, the sacrificial meat is cooked and eaten by everyone together. Only after satisfying the deity may one enter the new house. This ceremony is called “*Changpitaowa*.” If this ritual is not done, various physical troubles may arise, such as stomach bloating, pain, and other ailments.

Afterwards, the helpers who worked all day are served rice, meat, and *haria*. Among the Totos, *haria* is called *yu*. Once the feast is done, each guest bids farewell to the householder and returns to their own home. (Kalicharan Toto. Personal interview. 14 November 2024.)

#### The list of Auxiliary words associated with the vernacular dwellings of the todos:

As the use of the Toto language is still confined within the Toto community. Since their population is small and the need for the Toto language in daily life is limited, its usage has declined. In everyday activities and ways of living, Totos and Nepalis spend much of their time together, and even during festivals and rituals, cultural exchanges take place, where the language used is often Nepali. Despite living together for generations, the Nepali community has shown little interest in learning or knowing the Toto language, as it is unnecessary. On the other hand, the Totos do not have to make any special effort to learn Nepali; they acquire it naturally from childhood through daily interaction. Due to the lack of regular practice of the Toto language and the more decisive influence of other languages, many familiar words of the Toto language are gradually disappearing from everyday use. (Bhakta Toto, Personal interview, 14 November 2024).

Thus, here is an effort to make a complete list of Toto vocabulary that is directly or indirectly related to the vernacular dwellings. These terms are not even used by the Toto youngs, However after a generation most of the indigenous terms may be forgotten. Thus, in this chapter, not only the architectural plan is Preserved but also the language of Toto, which is rapidly changing due to the substantial impact of other influential languages also documented (Dhaniram Toto, Personal interview, 14 November 2024)..

#### LIST of Toto words and their associated terms:

##### List: 2

| Toto words                 | English word or vocabulary                  |
|----------------------------|---|
| <b>Type of house</b>       |   |
| Sha                        | Home  |
| Dem sha                    | House of God and social gathering           |
| Nai ko sha                 | Personal house                              |
| Tong Sha/ Tung sha         | A field house to protect crops from animals |
| <b>Parts of the house:</b> |   |
| Jiri                       | Worshipping room                            |
| Siri                       | Bed room                                    |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Meiring                                      | Kitchen  |
| Duui   | Balcony  |
| deichi                                       | guest  |
| kengbu                                       | Thatching  |
| chipei                                       | floor  |
| badoi  | wall   |
| chib Yong                                    | Window   |
| lapung                                       | door   |
| Kaibu  | stairs   |
| Waodu  | Relling of the stairs  |
| ngai   | straw  |
| uiteng                                       | Wooden pillar (Those are large pillars that are used to hold the thatched roof.) |
| tuoyi  | Small wooden pillar (Those pillars are used to support the balcony)              |
| padan  | Bamboo is used for drying clothes. Adjusted in dui                               |
| <b>Instruments used for building a house</b> |  |
| Perdi  | rope   |
| Pashing                                      | Bamboo   |
| toche  | spade  |
| Patang                                       | All-purpose knife of Toto  |
| Karsuma                                      | small knife of Toto  |
| Associates                                   |  |
| goh/maoa                                     | Husband of the sister  |
| byaro  | friend   |
| pao  | priest   |
| <b>Food :</b>                                |  |
| Ama  | rice   |
| Biya   | Meat   |
| Paka   | pig  |
| Sangti                                       | soupe  |
| eu   | Traditional wine   |
| Taiti  | Wine serving spoon   |
| <b>Direction:</b>                            |  |
| Dangta                                       | North  |
| Nuta   | East   |
| Mangta                                       | South  |
| Dita   | West   |
| Tai  | Up   |
| Liee   | down   |

#### Analysis of salient features of the traditional houses:

Several merits and demerits are observed in the traditional houses that are recorded. Every response is noted from those who experienced their life in the thatched hut. Due to that, there was a massive chance for a hyped review, thus every point has been noted and discussed with in-depth analysis.

#### Merit:

Merit 1: Climatic adaptability: Every community member mentioned one merit of the house in the focus group discussion (field interview, June 2024): the controlled temperature. Almost all of them reported that, inside the house, it feels cooler than outside during summer and warmer than outside during winter.

Merit 2: Sustainable material use: The grass-thatched houses reduced soil erosion. When remaining in the corrugated tin house, rainwater directly falls on the roof sheet and flows like a stream. When the stream hits the ground strongly, massive soil erosion will be observed in the surroundings. However, in traditional houses, the leaves soak up the rainwater first and then slowly disperse water drop by drop. Soil erosion occurs when the drop touches the soil (Dhaniram Toto, Personal interview, 14 November 2024). On another environmental ground, they showed a symbiotic process of collecting and using resources as construction material. The grasses used for the roof thatching are materially wasted after a limited time, like the Kasi, which is grown at a particular time during the monsoon, and after the monsoon, they are all dried; thus, they collect the materials and use them for thatching. Bamboo was also an abundant product of Totopara. During the 1950s and 1960s, the economy of Totopara was regulated by the bamboo business (Barman 1956). Thus, the two primary construction resources do not cause harm to nature. Often, dead trees are used to build the house (Dhaniram Toto, Personal interview, 14 November 2024).

Merit 3: Social cohesion: Sharing labour regarding the Social ground- The houses symbolise social association. It may now be impossible to find out how the community has built this social association for building houses. But of course, inside the forest, where the life resource materials are minimal, the community must continuously go through various intra-specific and inter-specific struggles. This associative work shows that this social association has reduced the intra-specific struggle (Author's field notes, Totopara, Jan–June 2024). The phenomenon of sharing labour has been observed from financial perspectives- All the resources are collected from the forest and the unpaid labour, which means a complete house is made without exchanging money. This also inspired the modern civilised era- money is just a potential people carry. Social integration and sharing of labour with associative power can replace the purpose of money to a certain extent. Besides the prosperity, some backdrops are also there. Moreover, they are the primary cause behind the abolition of the traditional houses.

Demerit 1: Low durability of materials: Economic factors, added with infrastructure stability, are the leading cause behind the abolition of traditional toto houses raised by the community. The thatched roof lasts up to 2 years maximum. After that, the grasses are rotten. Thus, they have to change the roofs alternatively every two years. Moreover, the bamboo wall and pillars also weathered, dampened and rotted within 5 years; they must be changed. Thus, it becomes a massive burden for the households to rebuild their houses every other year (focus group discussion, June 2024).

Demerit 2: Decline of resource base: The next point was thoroughly emphasised: the scarcity of materials once the number of toto families is minimal. In a census report for 1951, 71 toto families were recorded (Majumder 1998). At present, there are almost 441 toto families (BCW reports). Therefore, maintaining their houses in traditional architectural value is hard enough. Because the bamboo is rapidly becoming extinct in Totopara. Once, 12 varieties of babamboo were found in Totopara. However, now only 4-5 kinds of bamboo are identified by the community members. They also reported that, due to environmental change and massive deforestation at the bank of the Torsha River under the territory of Nilpara forest range of Jaldapara National forest, no more kashi or thatching grass is available. Thus, this material scarcity also drives them to accept the alternatives (focus group discussion, June 2024).

Demerit 3: Climatic vulnerability (roof leakage, dampness from heavy rainfall): The weather of Totopara causes the next demerit. Totopara is present in the buffer zone of Jaldapara National Forest and the foothills of the Himalayas. Thus, a massive rainfall was observed here. Almost every day has showers from March to October, and the weather is arid from November to March. Therefore, those alternate weather conditions adversely affect the materials of the houses. The extreme rainfall has damaged the grass of the roof, and the bamboo is also rotting due to the moisture, which causes several damages. Leaked water from the roof and split bamboo walls are also reported. Thus, these regular inconveniences in daily life have also inspired the community to a paradigm shift for the construction of new patterns of houses (focus group discussion, June 2024).

### **Key driving factors influence for changes in patterns in dwellings:**

I. Economic factor: The Toto communities are experiencing economic development. Due to stable bettlenut production, the development of transportation to the nearest town, Madarihat, gave them economic liberation. With this, 21 people are now working at different government departments. Department (Biswas, 2024). From library services, to the indian army, some serve in the Bank, Backwards Class Welfare department. Those who received a handsome ransom as salary influenced them to lead a more sophisticated and luxurious lifestyle. As well as when the young generation is introduced to a broader society, as they are forced to go as migratory labourers to different states, including Sikkim, Bhutan, Bangalore and other major cities of India, they are inspired by the luxuries and comforts as well as the standard of living. When they return from work, they try to implement the same degree of comfort in their households and surroundings (focus group discussion, June 2024). This economic upliftment and exposure to the broader society have inspired the community to shift from its orthodox pattern.

II. Government aid and government schemes: Since the 1960s, continuous support has been provided to the Totos people. We received the earliest data from Amal K das(1969), where he mentioned that - 15 Totos receiving house building grant (each getting Rs. 500/- for the purpose). From the Government, the following eight persons have already built new types of wooden houses, and the rest have also intimated that they would start the work. Those houses cost more than the amount the Totos get on the house-building grant from the Government. Moreover, the surplus cost has been provided by the Toto households themselves. The same factors and system have been maintained to this day. However, the influence on the planning for the construction of the house is different. From the pictorial archive of Shri Bimalendu Majumder, we find that in Past, the ITBP funds were used to build traditional pattern houses. (Majumdar 1986). But now the Fund Realising Authority has prescribed a particular design or plan, more over, the pattern of the houses is not always maintained as specified by the government. Individuals highly customise the heights and designs most of the time. Thus, they did not become eligible to accept the fund for a second time. (Rupchand Toto, Personal interview, 28 November 2024).

III. Influences of the Outer world at Toto Para: Different Nepalese tribes, including Tamang, Mangar, Rai, Limbu, Newar, Bengalees, Biharis, and Garo families, are now receding in Toto Para. Moreover, their continuous input in diverse dimensions in the life practices of the people has been observed. The Nepali housing pattern with wood planks influenced the Toto dwellers most due to the sustainability and the abundance of wood from the three-sided totopara forest. NGOs and social organisations also know basic hygiene (Rupchand Toto, Personal interview, 28 November 2024).

These interlinked pressures and opportunities have accelerated the decline of orthodox Toto dwellings and fostered hybridised architectural forms, marking a shift from community-built bamboo structures to hybrid and pucca dwellings.

### **Present circumstances:**

However, at present, 14 traditional houses are still in operation. Moreover, most of them are reported to have an immediate change. Alternatively, they are not entirely built with a conventional pattern. Different levels of customisation have been made. Only three houses maintain the proper plan for the total dwellings.

### LIST 3:

| Villages       | The number of traditional dwellings is operational | notes  |
|----------------|--|--|
| Puja gaon      | 7  | At the extension of Poar Gaon, where a new village has emerged. Yoyia gaon is not a proper residential village. This is the farm land belonging to the Toto community.                             |
| Panchayat Gaon | 6  | At the Airungpa part of the village. Most of the houses are made of bamboo, but the structure is customised here.  |
| Subba Gaon     | 2  | At the chamba line, Part of the village. This is a part of Subba Gaon. This was also a forest that became a farm field, now identified as a separate village.                                      |
| Panchayat Gaon | 1  | Parmading Part of Panchayat gaon. This is the farm land belonging to the Toto community. However, day by day, several residential houses are being built, and a new village is going to be formed. |

Except for the three (3 Nos.) traditional houses at Yoyia Gaon, the rest do not maintain orthodox dwelling patterns. Different levels of customisation have been noted during the field survey. They are indicated as follows.

**Materials and Construction:** Toto people have a specific supernatural belief that they will have a curse on the households if they cut a living tree to use its wood (Barman 1956), but at present, this taboo has diminished. Most use wooden planks even when making house walls; iron nails and bolts are abundantly used everywhere. Ropes are also not made with odla tree bark. Nylon and plastic ropes are included in the scenario. In the 14 orthodox houses, eight houses have bamboo walls, but the thatching was shifted to parapulin or corrugated sheet.

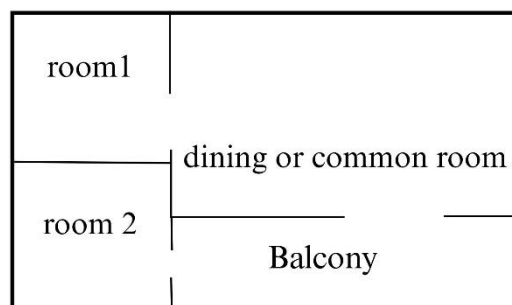
**Planning of the house:** The house plans and construction materials are changed and customised. Let us have a comparative study of the purposes of the parts of the house with more details. However, the holiness of the Jiri is maintained (focus group discussion, June 2024). The idea of Daichi Ko Siri has been changed. It was associated with unmarried daughters and notions of family dignity, but it has become more flexible, reflecting a shift towards cultural assimilation and a degree of Sanskritisation.

**Social integrity:** being a clan man or the relatives to be informed was unnecessary. Now the society is more diversified. Thus, instead of family relations, friends join to build the house. Moreover, in this nuclear family era, the number of siblings is drastically decreasing; thus, the number of sisters, husbands, and family members is also decreasing. However, if somebody has sisters and has a good relationship with her husbands and family, they will help (Dhaniram Toto, personal interview, June 2024). The following section, therefore, examines some key driving forces of how these evolving dwelling





Modern Toto House



Common Lay-out of Govt.  
subsidised single floored corrugated  
sheet covered house

forms influence broader socio-cultural dynamics in Totopara. Two patterns of modern houses are pervasive in Totopara, Nepali and Toto. Now, it is tough to identify Toto dwellers from different communities at Toto Para.

**The pattern of the hoses of Toto dwellers is now typical in totopara as follows:**

- i) The corrugated tin house: These houses are made of bricks that are thatched with corrugated tin. The government partially funds these houses. Most houses are made in the same architectural design: two rooms and one balcony. The sizes of the rooms are also the same. The government provides the plans.
- ii) Single-storeyed pucca house: single-storeyed pucca houses are custom-made by owners, while some subsidy amounts have been received from the government through different house-building schemes at other times.
- iii) Two-storey building ( upper floor wooden): most of the two-storeyed buildings found in Totopara, owned by Toto people, have a ground floor made of concrete, and the upper floor has both floors nd walls that are completely wooden.
- iv) An entirely concrete two-storey building: Bhakta Toto, the retired bank manager, owns a fully concrete two-storey building only in the Toto community.

**Tong sha:** Tong sha is a notable cultural aspect of the housing arrangement in Totopara that demands specific attention. Most Toto families are seen to construct an auxiliary house, or Tungsa, in the central area of their cultivable land where some family members usually live during the cultivation season(Barman 1956).. The Tong is a resting place during work hours and is used by men at night during harvest season to guard crops. Elephants often raid crop fields, causing significant damage to crops and deer, monkeys, and birds. Occasionally, food is prepared there, and the family members residing in that location live independently from those in the main house.

*Tong* houses, on an architectural structure, are built on stilts, rising 15–20 feet above the ground, with only a thatched roof on top, no walls are there, and no partitioned rooms are established on a platform of slitted bamboo. Most of them used pillars on four sides, but earlier, tong houses were based on a strong branch of a giant tree. Both of them use a ladder or long stairs to reach the platform.

These structures remain the same as earlier. However, changes are significantly observed at Yoyia Gaon; some dwellers have



Toto Tong House

upgraded their tong houses to traditional houses with some residing amenities and resources, while their leading houses inside the hamlet have been completely upgraded.

For the changing pattern of tong sa is equally discussed in the discussion, it is pointed out that as the population of the toto community increases day by day, there is no available land for the dwellers to maintain tong sa in its old purpose; instead, the same amount of land can serve as permanent dwellings for their family members and can act as both.

**Expression of the community about this drastic change:** Through multiple group discussions from January 2024 to June 2024, it can be followed up that:

1. It is clear that in the current Socio-economic scenario, it is likely impossible for the group to return to their traditional houses. Even now, conventional house dwellers are treated as “poor families” in society, and they always aspire to come out of the segmentation. They possessed no glory inside their hearts but pretended to be sufferers. Thus, they accept it whenever they get support from different levels and systematically diminish their traditional houses(Focus group discussion, June 2024).
2. People are emotional and romantic about their old dwellings, but have no economic support to keep the houses. At present, bamboo and other materials are more costly and unstable. Thus, they were forced to change and abolish their old dwelling patterns(Focus group discussion, June 2024).
3. Some elite people like Bhakta Toto and Bhim Toto often romanticised the idea that they wanted to build the orthodox house pattern as a token of their uniqueness, not to reside there permanently. They want to develop orthodox houses with a proper plan and materials, such as an article to show visitors. Severally, they emphasised that if they do not conserve the dwelling patterns, the tradition will be lost entirely and they will have nothing to deliver to their next generation (Bhakta Toto, *Personal interview*, 15 May 2024; Bhim Toto, *Personal interview*, 16 May 2024)
4. Other educated youths residing in Totopara now contribute to society by being aware of the traditional vernacular houses and wish to maintain the conventional dwellings at heart. They will conserve the structure if they get economic and social support (Focus group discussion, June 2024).
5. For the changing pattern of tong sa is equally discussed in the discussion, it is pointed out that as the population of the toto community increases day by day, there is no available land for the dwellers to maintain tong sa in its old purpose; instead, the same amount of land can serve as permanent dwellings for their family members and can act as both.
6. Women members of the society highlighted serious concerns regarding the transition from traditional residences related to sanitation and safety, with the presence of cattle and poultry beneath the elevated platforms of older homes. An unhygienic ambience of animal excrement, mixed with moist bamboo flooring, creates an unsanitary environment. Some also pointed out that the unhygienic atmosphere was closely connected to repeated illnesses of children (Focus group discussion, June 2024).
7. Young women's groups expressed their privacy concerns. Conventional arrangements provided minimal Separation between living and sleeping areas, which became uneasy when daughters entered puberty. Relatively, contemporary residences, including sectional rooms, were esteemed for the dignity and safety they provided to female family members (Author’s field notes, Totopara, 2024).

#### Action need for protection:

- Community-Centric Conservation Initiatives: Preservation must extend beyond archive documentation and be actively advocated within Totopara. Creating community-driven cultural centres, supported by NGOs and academic institutions.
- That would promote economic and cultural motivations to preserve traditional housing practices.
- Models of Sustainable Housing: Housing structures that integrate contemporary durability with traditional aesthetics and environmental consciousness should be promoted.
- Engagement of Youth: Given the younger Toto generation's awareness and emotional connection to their architectural legacy, it is effective to implement youth-oriented workshops, training sessions, and cultural activities. These initiatives can cultivate pride and provide younger members with actual conservation skills.
- Policies and Government Initiatives: Housing plans must be restructured to permit adaptable designs that Honor traditions instead of enforcing inflexible templates. Financial subsidies may be increased for households that preserve or restore vernacular architecture.
- Documentation and Distribution: Systematic recording through photography, architecture, and ethnography should be preserved for research archives, exhibitions, educational purposes, and to enhance public engagement. Aariyom's work to build a Museum-cum-Cultural Conservation Village sets up a strong system for protecting both physical and non-physical history.

#### Final Analysis:

The architectural traditions of the Toto community transcend simple housing; they are cultural texts that encapsulate natural balance, resource utilisation, and social cohesion. However, economic advancement, material shortages, governmental policies, and external factors have motivate the neglect of these residences. The study indicates a dual sentiment of nostalgia and pragmatism within the community: historic dwellings are esteemed as cultural icons, yet are regarded as unsustainable for daily habitation.

The issue, consequently, resides in reconciling continuity with change. This study demonstrates that the evolution of Toto architecture mirrors broader adaptation and identity negotiation processes. Integrating scholarly documentation with practical conservation—via community engagement, adaptable policy formulation, and organisations such as Aariyom—

can ensure that the heritage of Toto homes is maintained not merely as artefacts of history but as vibrant manifestations of inventiveness, resilience, and cultural pride.

#### Interviews have been conducted to conduct the study:

1. Shri Dhaniram Toto - Padmashree Awardee, retired state government service holder, Social Reformer and postulate of Toto Script.
2. Shri Bhakta Toto - Author of the first Toto Dictionary (published), retired bank manager
3. Shri Rupchand Toto- Current Gram Panchayat Pradhan of Totopara Ballalguri Gram Panchayat
4. Shri Bal Bahadur Moktan- Ex-gram panchayat Pradhan Totopara, Ballalguri Gram Panchayat.
5. Shri Kalicharan Toto- recognised Priest of the Toto community.
6. Shri Bhim Toto- Retired Indian Army soldier. First from the Toto community.
7. Shri Soney Toto - Assistant Teacher at Chittaranjan Toto Memorial School.
8. Shri Bharat Toto- Social Activist. Founder of Paraiwasha.
9. Shri Avishek Toto- Assistant Teacher of Chittaranjan Toto Memorial School.
10. Shri Kreka Toto- village dwellers
11. Shri Dorje Toto- village dwellers
12. Shri Duare Toto- Village artisans

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5. Shri Bhakta Toto

6. Shri Rupchand Toto
7. Shri Bal Bahadur Moktan
8. Shri Kalicharan Toto
9. Shri Bhim Toto
10. Shri Soney Toto
11. Shri Bharat Toto
12. Shri Avishek Toto
13. Shri Kreka Toto
14. Shri Dorje Toto
15. Shri Duare Toto

**LIST Data Resources:**

LIST 1: Collected from Backward class welfare Department office Totopara.

LIST 2: Collected from various interviews and Author's field work.

LIST 3: Authors field research

**Image Resourceses:** All images of this paper are exclusively documented by the author during field work and research work.