

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of the study

Former Prime Minister of India Jawahar Lal Nehru had rightly remarked “*Education of a boy is education of one person, but education of a girl is the education of the entire family.*” Women must be educated because it is they who give birth even to the kings. They constitute one half of the humanity and any national programme of reconstruction should envisage the cooperation of women. In ancient times women were confined to the hearth and home and in bearing and rearing children. However, they enjoyed a high status in society. But down the ages their status in society has been constantly changing.

Education is the first step in improving and making rural infrastructure better, but we need to check how well we've reached the children in rural India. Our country's constitution was made with the idea of treating everyone equally, no matter their colour, gender, or religion (Dinesh and Chandrashekar, 2015).

Increasing girls' participation in school is commonly regarded as beneficial to both people and communities, as well as an indicator of social fairness (Buchmann & DiPrete, 2006). Female literacy levels in diverse South Asian civilizations, however, are dismally low due to gender imbalance, cultural challenges, and parents' unfavourable socioeconomic condition (Cairns et al., 2014). Even in nations where formal educational institutions are accessible, girls drop out at a higher rate than boys (Barone, 2011; Carvalho, 2015). Several central and state government policies (such as mid-day lunches, direct financial transfers for purchasing books and stationery, distribution of bicycles to female students, and so on) have been established in India to increase females' involvement and successful completion of primary and secondary education. While enrolment and retention of female students have risen, success stories are primarily focused among India's mainstream populations. Existing research has shown that females from various communities in India experience disadvantages that are founded in macro-societal variables such as remote geographical location and limited economic prospects (Kalra & Bhugra, 2013; Sen et al., 2009). However, there has been little research into the factors that lead to the stagnation or loss of ST girls' educational standing at both the primary and secondary levels.

Scheduled Tribes are the most disadvantaged group of people and they are socially and geographically isolated. The term “scheduled tribe” first appeared in the Constitution of India, to confer certain constitutional privileges and protection to a group of people who are considered disadvantaged and backward. Out of the total tribal population, tribal women add up to almost half. Like all other communities, development of status of tribal communities also largely depends on the upliftment of the socio-economic status of tribal women. Socio-economic condition means an economic and social combined total measure of a person’s work experience and of an individual’s or family’s economic and social position in relation to others; based on income, education, and occupation (Bhattacharya 2014).

Education is a basic right and an important engine of socio-economic development. However, there are many barriers that tribal women in India face in accessing education. Despite various government programs and initiatives promoting the education of tribal populations, tribal women's educational attainment remains very low compared to that of their non-tribal counterparts (Damor et.al 2024). Education is crucial for everyone and is key to overall development. It helps bring about positive changes, improves understanding, reduces exploitation within communities, and affects growth, health, and social well-being (Gupta and Priyanka, 2015)

Scheduled tribes represent primarily the indigenous people of this country, as identified by the government as the most backward socially and economically. The scheduled tribes in India are considered as the weakest section of society with respect to all socio-economic and socio-demographic factors like poverty, illiteracy, lack of healthcare and basic hygiene, etc. These groups urgently need special protection to prevent exploitation and the violation of their rights. Even though the Indian Constitution has provided protection for these native people since 1950, they remain one of the most underdeveloped groups in India.(Agrawal, 2010).

The scheduled tribes constitute about 8.2% of the total population in India (Census of India, 2001). About 93.80% live in rural areas and 6.20% live in urban areas (Census of India, 1981).The literacy percentage among India's Scheduled Tribes (STs) is 63.1%, according to the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), which is much lower than the national literacy rate 72.8%; (Census, 2011).

Tribal women have lower levels of education, work opportunities, and health compared to both men and women from the general population(Paray,2019). Most tribal parents are usually not educated. They don't pay much attention to their

children's education, especially when they are young. These parents don't interact with people outside their community and don't understand the value of education. Teaching these students is very difficult, and teachers often don't try hard enough to help them improve (Haseena and Mohammed, 2014). Jayaswal et al (2003) expressed how parental support affects the academic success of tribal school students. They discovered that parents of high-achieving students provided much more support for their children's studies compared to parents of low-achieving students. The parents of high achievers were dedicated, focused on the quality of their children's performance, and very interested in their children's education and success. On the other hand, parents of low achievers were less ambitious, had lower self-confidence, and provided less guidance for their children. In India, it's commonly believed that tribal communities face more limitations than urban ones. Family involvement plays a significant role in a child's development. This aspect is connected to children's motivation to study, their achievements, and their performance in tasks (Dinesh and Chandrashekar, 2015).

Tribal women constitute one of the poorest and most marginalized strata in Indian society. The national commission for scheduled tribes reports that the poverty ratio of scheduled tribes (STs) stands at 45.3% as on 2011-12, while the national average is just 21.9%. Tribal women are also marked by illiteracy and low levels of education. Literacy among ST women is 49.4, according to the 2011 census, while the national average for women is 65.5. They also suffer from high malnourishment and poor health results. According to results from the national family health survey 2015-16, ST women had an anaemia prevalence rate of 62.5% compared to national average for women of 53%. The infant mortality rate among STs stood at 44.4 per 1000 live births against 37.9 per 1000 live births for the whole country(Manna,2024).

India has been impoverishing the tribal community in innumerable ways. Among these impoverished people, tribal women are the most affected. Though tribal women may be more or less cut off from the mainstream of national life, they are not always cut off entirely from the overwhelming impact of new transitions that sweep over our civilization every day. The fact remains that a large number of tribal women have not acquired basic education. Education is a potential instrument for the empowerment of every individual. (Panda, 2013).

1.1 Literacy rate of Women in India

As per the 2011 Census, the total literacy rate in India stands at 74.00 per cent and the rate of literacy among women is 65.46 per cent. The percentage of female literacy in the country was 54.16 per cent in 2001. The literacy rate in the country has increased from 18.33 per cent in 1951 to 74.00 per cent as per 2011 census. The female literacy rate has also increased from 8.86 per cent in 1951 to 65.46 per cent in 2011. Female literacy rate during the period 1991-2001 increased by 14.87 per cent whereas male literacy rate rose by 11.72 per cent. The increase in female literacy rate was 3.15 per cent more compared to male literacy rate.

According to 2011 census study, total literacy rate of Assam is 72.19%.The male literacy rate is 77.85% and female literacy rate is 66.27%.

Table.1.1 Male -female literacy Rate of India,1951-2011

Census Year	Total Population (per cent)	Males (per cent)	Females (per cent)
1951	18.3	27.2	8.9
1961	28.3	40.4	15.4
1971	34.5	46.0	22.0
1981	43.6	56.4	29.8
1991	52.2	64.1	39.8
2001	64.8	75.3	53.7
2011	74.00	80.9	64.6

1.2 Data Showing Literacy Rate of Scheduled Tribes in India and in Assam-

Table-1.2: Showing state wise literacy rate of STs in all the states

State/UTs	Schedule Tribe		
	Total	Male	Female
Andhra Pradesh	49.2	58.3	40.1
Arunachal Pradesh	64.6	71.5	58.0
Assam	72.1	79.0	65.1
Bihar	51.1	61.3	40.4
Chhattisgarh	59.1	69.7	48.8
Goa	79.1	87.2	71.5
Gujarat	62.5	71.7	53.2
Himachal Pradesh	73.6	83.2	64.2
Jammu & Kashmir	50.6	60.6	39.7
Jharkhand	57.1	68.2	46.2
Karnataka	62.1	71.1	53.0
Kerala	75.8	80.8	71.1
Madhya Pradesh	50.6	59.6	41.5
Maharashtra	65.7	74.3	57.0
Manipur	77.4	82.1	72.7
Meghalaya	74.5	75.5	73.5
Mizoram	91.5	93.6	89.5
Nagaland	80.0	83.1	76.9
Orissa	52.2	63.7	41.2
Rajasthan	52.8	67.6	37.3
Sikkim	79.7	85.0	74.3
Tamil Nadu	54.3	61.8	46.8
Tripura	79.1	86.4	71.6
Uttar Pradesh	55.7	67.1	43.7
Uttarakhand	73.9	83.6	63.9
West Bengal	57.9	68.2	47.7
A & N Islands	75.6	80.9	69.9
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	61.9	73.6	50.3
Daman & Diu	78.8	86.2	71.2
Lakshadweep	91.7	95.7	87.8

Source: Census of India, 2011. Registrar General of India

Across all states in India, there is a noticeable difference between the literacy rates of Scheduled Tribe men and women (Table:1.2). The literacy rate for Scheduled Tribe men is higher than ST women. In Assam, the overall literacy rate for the Tribe is 72.1%, with men at 79% and women at 65.1%, creating a gap of 13.9%. This shows that tribal women are lagging behind in education.

Table 1.3 Showing literacy trends for Scheduled Tribes in India from 1961 to 2011

Year	Total	Male	Female
1961	8.53	13.83	3.16
1971	11.30	17.63	4.85
1981	16.35	24.52	8.05
1991	29.60	40.65	18.19
2001	47.10	59.17	34.76
2011	58.96	68.53	49.35

Source: National Commission for SCs & STs, Fifth Report & Census, 2011

From Table 1.3, it can be understood that the literacy trend of tribal women in India from 1961 to 2011 highlights significant progress but also underscores a prevailing gender gap. Tribal female literacy has increased significantly from 3.16% in 1961 to 49.35% in 2011. This highlights substantial development in educational access and awareness among tribal communities over 50 years. Year 1961 reflects a 10.67 per cent gap between the literacy rates of male and female tribal populations (13.83% for males, 3.16% for females). However, in 2011 although this gap reduced to 19.18 percentage points (68.53% for males, 49.35% for females), it still highlights an important disparity and needs intervention for bridging the gap.

Table. 1.4 Showing Literacy rate among major STs in Assam (Census 2001)

Name of Scheduled Tribe	Literacy rate (7 years and above)		
	Total	Male	Female
All STs	62.5	72.3	52.4
Dimasa	59.6	69.4	49.3
Mikir	53.7	64.1	43.0
Boro	61.3	71.4	51.1
Deori	76.2	84.8	67.5
Kachari	81.4	88.2	74.4
Lalung	61.8	72.0	51.6
Miri	60.1	71.4	48.3
Rabha	66.7	76.2	57.0

From Table: 1.4, The male and female literacy rate of 72.3 % and 52.4 % respectively show that women are lagging by 19.9 percentage points. Kachari (Sonowal) with 81.4 per cent literacy rate are well ahead of others. On the other hand, it is low among Mikir (53.7 per cent). Among Kachari (Sonowal), the female literacy rate of 74.4 per cent is quite close to male (88.2 per cent). Gender gap in literacy among Miri, however, has been recorded to be the highest. With 71.4 per cent male and 48.3 per cent female literacy, the Miri women are lagging way behind by as much as 23.1 per cent points. A two third (65.4 per cent) of the ST population in the age group 5-14 years has been attending schools or any other educational institutions. Of the eight major STs, it is the highest among Kachari (Sonowal) with 80.2 per cent of their population of this age group attending educational institutions. In addition, Deori (79.8 per cent), Rabha (70.2 per cent), and Boro (68.2 per cent) have also registered this proportion above state average for STs, while Mikir have registered below the state average (54.9 per cent). Deori is well ahead, among the eight major STs in Assam, with 4.9 per cent graduate and above. Mikir, Rabha, and Lalung are at the bottom, each having less than two per cent of their literate population with educational level graduation and above.

1.3 Problems of Tribal Women's Education

Tribal women, like any other social group, make up half the whole population. Tribal women, like women from other social groups, face several challenges concerning reproductive health. In fact, women outnumber men in terms of primary and secondary subsistence activities. Analysing the position of women with regards to society is quite a big issue now. The theoretical model to analyse women's status covers all seven roles a woman plays in her life and at work: parental, spousal, domestic, kin, professional, community, and individual (Chowdhury et al.2022).

In the area of education for women from different tribes, there are many critical issues and challenges. Most tribal settlements disperse all over the woods. Due to this, it becomes impractical to open segregated schools in each community when the minimum student strength is not available. Tribal settlements on other lands are separated from one another by such physical obstacles like rivers, hills, las, and forests. With these physical constraints, it becomes very difficult for tribal village

females to reach the school of a neighbouring community. Parents in this situation do not allow their daughters to go to school(Chowdhury et al.2022).

Culture of nomadic pastoralism is the main factor causing barriers to education in schools leading to education disparity, while early marriage and discrimination against girl children are considered the major causes leading to drop-outs in schools(Hussein,2016).

Early marriage was a big issue that made it hard for women to get an education in rural areas. Parents believed in traditional ideas about getting their daughters early marriage, often before their first period (Bhandary, 2017). When there are daughters in the tribal family, their parents save money for them to plan their marriage. After this, the husbands and the in-laws allow women to pursue education with their consent and funding; otherwise, they have to do household chores and fulfil the needs and demands of family members. Thus, the major reason for dropping out among tribal girls is household chores and early marriages. Households have been forced to give up their education, though not exclusively due to their academic failure but rather for social and academic reasons(Sen & Roy,2021)

The economic conditions combined with cultural norms and values have played a negative role to particular extent in the development of women's education of the tribals in general (Pangging,2022).There are cultural and psychological factors that affect the prospects of women in education. Psychological, socio-cultural, and economic factors which, in many cases, are supposed to serve as an opportunity for women in their education become barrier for women in their educational prospects(Ankomah & Drammeh 2017).

In fact, poverty is one of the major challenges. As reported on the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (2018), several tribal families are at or below the poverty line. Hence, it makes it very hard for them to spare the cost of school fees, uniforms, and even books. For sending children, particularly daughters, to school, the opportunity cost to such families is often prohibitively high, as every member of the family is needed to earn through employment. Rao and Narain (2010) argue that such economic strain forces families to settle for immediate survival needs above long-term educational investments.

Language and cultures are the past two barriers to education for tribal students; they determine certain livelihood options for these students as per their exceptional culture, tradition, prevailing norms, beliefs, and philosophies with respect to life. The gap in understanding the language hampers effective communication between students to their teachers as well as between students to students, thus affecting their understanding of academic concepts and acceptance of other cultures, norms, and principles(Damor, et al,2024).

Moreover, in tribal societies, preference is given to the males as compared to the females. The daughters are kept as liabilities, with no returns expected from them, rather they are expected to ask for various things. Sons are considered assets as it is expected that a well-educated son would be a major contributor to the welfare of his family and the society at large. Because of this prevalent discriminatory treatment towards them, girls continue to be denied access to education and participation in multiple tasks and activities. It is well known that indigenous women face challenges in accessing education because of discrimination.

1.4 Who are the Bodos?

Boro or Bodo or Kachari is the earliest known indigenous community of Assam (Karjie, 2019).

The term Bodo was used for the first time used by B. H. Hogdson in 1846 to call a racial group of people. The Bodos are regarded as the first inhabitants of Assam. It is believed that in the pre-historic ages the Bodo tribes came into India from regions within their native bounds of Tibet and China. E. Gait referred to them as the earliest known inhabitants of the Brahmaputra valley (Gait E.A. 1967). The Bodos are recognized as the Scheduled Tribes(STs) of Assam in the Indian Constitution. The 2011 census shows that there are 1.4 million Bodo people. The Bodos are mainly found in the five districts that make up the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR). According to the 2011 census, the scheduled tribe's population in these districts is as follows: Kokrajhar district has 278,651, Baksa district has 331,006,Chirang district has 178,689, and Udalguri district has 267,381.

Among the different ethnic groups forming the population of the modern state of Assam, the Bodos or Kacharis make up the biggest group. In general, they form part of the Mongoloid social structure. As inhabitants of the Brahmaputra valley, the

Bodos (Kacharis) can be said to twill the aborigine or the oldest inhabitants. In the study of Rev. Sidney Endle, Bodo or Kachari people were regarded as the first inhabitants of Assam. Bodo people of Assam's Brahmaputra valley are therefore called as "sons of the soil" (bhumiputra)'. They are known by several names in the country. They are known as Meches in Nepal and in western Bengal. In western Assam, they call themselves Boro, while in the rest of Assam, they are called Kachari by the Assamese people. In upper Assam Sonowal and Thengal Kachari are the tribes. In North Cachar hills and Cachar they are called Dimasa and Barmans respectively (Narzary,2020).

1.5 Socio-Cultural and Economic Life of Bodos in Assam

Bodo villages typically consist of joint families that work together cooperatively. They live and work collectively, and that many social and cultural development projects in villages are carried out by the Bodos villagers themselves. (Brahma, 2002). The Bodo constitute the largest major tribal-indigenous group, not only of Assam but the entire North-East India. The Bodo people, being one of the oldest inhabitants in the Northeast part of the country, are quite rich in cultural heritage (Das,2020). Racially, they belong to the Mongoloids stock of Indo-Mongoloids or Indo-Tibetans. But it is supposed that they inherited their language from the Tibeto-Burman branch of the 'Tibeto-Chinese' family, belonging to the Mongoloid group. Although Bodo people mostly inhabit the northern slope of the Brahmaputra valley, traces of their presence have even been reported in some parts of Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland. Their rich culture guarantees a healthy ecological status within the society (Brahma,2011). The course of modern history will be such that one can picture the transformation of the of the traditional Bodo society in its social outlook during the 20th century on account of close contacts with other cultures. Social institutions, subject to change with the passage of time, include religion, marriages, economy, and social custom, as well as the diverse forms of social status, food habit, attire, and other aspects of life. Nonetheless, the Bodo society moves ahead with these changes, with their basic values, norms, and identities intact (Phukan,2019). Their socio-religious life is identified with the link established between man and nature. In fact, agriculture being the mainstay and hence the most potent factor in their economy is an exceptionally intricate relationship with nature. (Boro,2020).

Social Structure: The family is the basic unit of social structure in every society. The Bodo society is predominantly patriarchal. In the Bodo family, the term used is "Nokhor". A Nokhor possesses the members of traditional society, such as grandfather, grandmother, father, mother, sons, daughter, uncle, aunts and their children etc. So, a Nokhor comprises grandfather, grandmother, father, mother, sons, daughter, uncle, aunts and their children etc. In the traditional Bodo society, the father, the single guardian of a family is the head of the family, who is obeyed by other members of the Nokhor (Owary, 2021).

Religion: 'Bathouism' is the ancient religion of the Bodos. Bathouism is considered to be one of the major religions that were followed in ancient times in this world. In this religion, the planting of 'Sijou' trees is done and worshipped as the symbol of the Almighty. This is done by placing an egg or a round stone under the tree sijou. Other than this, the deity is satisfied by offering local rice wine and meat/flowers while performing rites such as "deodhani" and 'kherai' dance (Basumatary, 2014). In the Bodo ethnic group, religion has been changing more recently. Concurrently, there has been a rise in worship of the Hindu deities resulting in the prominent presence of Hinduism in Bodo society. The Bodos are said to have practiced animism. And some Bodo people are accepting Christianity and other religion as their faith. (Valan & Muthukumar, 2022).

Dress and Ornaments: The Dresses and Ornaments is another important part of culture of which is the symbol of the traditional Bodo culture. The dresses of Bodo people are unique and full of colours, with style and attractiveness. The traditional attire is always hand-woven, which is also a testimony of Bodo women's talent in weaving. Bodo girls and women are very good weavers as they learn to weave from young age. Weaving has become a known culture of Bodos. Actually, they have wonderful closed attachment with nature since early times. So, they are expert to present it on their dresses with creativity. They weave different kind of clothes like Dokhna, Jwmgra, Gamsha, Phali, Hishima etc. The Bodo menfolk used to wear male garment which is called 'Gamsha'. The Bodo women represent their distinct cultural feature through the unique colourful dresses. Traditionally, Bodo have used different types of ornaments for nose, ears, neck and hands, e.g., Phulkhuri, Japkhiring, Dul,

Boula (For upper ear), Nakhaphul (nose), Chandra Har (heavy neckless), Bisa Har (single piece neckless), Thanka Siri (round neck ornament), Jibou Zinziri (snake like chain) and Ashan which mean bangle (Mochahary,2019).

Marriage: Marriage is a really important institution in human society, and it holds great significance in the lives of people in the Bodo community. Most marriages are monogamous; however, polygamy is reported to be prevalent in the Bodo society in particular exceptional conditions. The different types of marriage that prevail within the Bodo society are Swngnai Haba (Arranged Marriage), Kharsonnai Haba (Girl flee away), Gwrjiya Lakhinai Haba (Groom staying with Brides family in their house), 'Dwnkharnai' Haba (Elopement) and 'Dongkha Habnai' Haba means (widow remarriage). Marriage within the Bodo community remains associated with various rites and rituals that dates back to time immemorial (Boro,2020)

Food Habits : Rice can be regarded as the chief sustenance of the Bodo tribe. The various varieties of paddy rice they cultivate range from ahu to Sali, joha, bora, aaijong and ranjit. Khar-a liquid food is one of the favorites of the Bodo. It is prepared using the burning of the dry bark and root portion of the banana tree. The Bodo people enjoy gathering leafy greens like curry leaves, skunk vine, and ferns to add to their favourite dishes. Living in a naturally rich area of India, they often collect these vegetables directly from nature. In addition to these greens, they also enjoy eating meat. They have a tradition of raising poultry, pigs, and fishing for their own food. They make and drink local rice wine as part of their traditional diet. They also like various types of mash recipes, which are a popular food in Assam. (Das,2020).

Economic activities: Agriculture has been the mainstay economy for the Bodos since early times. Different varieties of rice have been cultivated by them. They also cultivated several crops like mustard, jute, cotton, tobacco, and so on and vegetables such as potato, cabbage, cauliflower, radish, cucumber, gourd, green leaves, pulse, beans, small-beans, sweet potato, turmeric, pumpkin, melon, brinjal, etc. including varieties of spices like chili, onion, garlic, coriander, ginger, etc. until today. (Mondal,2011). In the past, the Bodos depended on other activities such as hunting-gathering, animal husbandry, handicrafts, and so on. Their economy was much influenced by frequent migrations. They placed a lot of value on the food they ate every

day. They were self-sufficient with minimum essentials and led a simple rural life without much learning about earning and accumulating wealth and property in those days. The economic life of the Bodos included activities like hunting, fishing, making handicrafts, spinning and weaving, and trading. (Brahma,2015). Since there was no market, or even a small bazaar in Bodo concentrated areas of Assam, the development of an interest in trading and commerce as the main or subsidiary professions was out of question. The small surplus derived from annual agricultural produce was not sold but liberally bartered with the items of trade brought by the Hindu traders to the Bodo villages along the river routes during summer months. The Bodo maidens were seen in their looms, weaving, but that too, is for their own use (Oinam & Kumud 2017).

Bodos remain true to their traditional patterns in culture, beliefs, and practices. However, there has been some change in their lives and culture over a period given all such influences from outside. Different sects of Hinduism, such as 'Bathouism', 'Vaisnavism', Brahma Dharma, and also Christianity, evolved among the Bodo society because of being under the influence of other faith. Therefore, they have dropped some customs that have existed for centuries as a result of adopting and practising new faiths. (Mochahary,2019). Bodo society has not been encouraged to trade in the early days, as they felt that it emphasized telling untruths. Bodos regarded the speaking of a lie as a sin; therefore, they were not engaged in trade and commerce (Brahma,2015).

However, when we look at the past, we can see that many things have changed in the economic life of the Bodos because of modernization. Many important traditions and rituals have disappeared from their society. Their traditional social and cultural practices have changed a lot due to adopting different religions and the effects of modernization. Now, Bodo people are also involved in business and trade.

1.6 The Educational Scenario of the Bodos during Pre-independence Period

➤ Educational scenario during pre-colonial period:

The Sanskrit-based Indo-Aryan educational system, which was common in mainland India, was already established in the Brahmaputra valley through the efforts of the Hindu community living there from the start. The rulers of Kamrupa, especially King Bhaskar Barman (594-650 A.D.), supported education, and

Kamrupa became a major centre for learning (Choudhury,1953). Hieun Tsang, in his visit to Kamrupa in the 7th century AD, stated that the kingdom attracted brilliant minds with enthusiasm for learning (Barua,1985). In Assam, the Varnasrama Dharma was commonly followed, and education was taught orally in Gurugrihas, Tols, and Pathsalas (Choudhury, 1953). The royal families gave land to support these organisations. Pathsalas and Tols were present in medieval Assam. Srimanta Sankardeva (1449-1568), a Vaisnavite saint from Assam, got his early education from Mahendra Kandali, a Brahmin teacher who ran a Tol, which offered lessons in all areas of traditional knowledge (Sarma, 1989). In the early 13th century, the Ahom rulers increased their power by adopting the language and culture of Assamese Hindus and by supporting Hindu education (Chakravarty, 1989). Sankardeva's promotion of 'Ek Sharan Nam Dharma' led to the creation of Satras and Namghars, where religious teachings were shared with followers. These places were not only used for prayers but also played a crucial role in bringing people together for religious and cultural learning. Namghars had many functions, such as acting as local meeting places, courts, schools, and places of worship. The local temple was also a well-known educational centre, where stories from epics and Puranas were read and explained (Barua, 2003).

However, the education system in Gurugrihas, Tols, Pathsalas, and Chatrachalas was not reaching its services to all people. The system mostly catered to the higher sections of society, such as the Brahmins, Kayasthas, and Kalitas. But, evidence does not suggest that students of other casts were denied entry into these institutes(Sarma,1989). There isn't much proof that the non-Aryan people who lived in that area before the Aryans came had a structured education system (Barpujari, 1990). They didn't have much experience with formal schooling, except for the skills they learned from their families, especially for those in regular tribal communities. Anil Boro mentioned in a talk about the Assamese tribal people that there's no proof of any other traditional institutions, whether for education or economical fields, besides the usual village communities called 'khels' and 'mels'(Boro, 2001).Thus, most Assamese tribes, apart from certain royal families, were entirely ignorant of formal education in the medieval times (Sarmah, 2014).

➤ *The Colonial State's Attempt to Educate the Bodos:*

In 1835, Francis Jenkins, who was the Commissioner of Assam at the time, set up three public schools in the Darrang area to give the Bodos a proper formal education. Starting in 1854, the provincial government worked with Christian missionaries to create an educational plan for the Bodo people in the Darrang area. This effort put the Bodos in the spotlight for the first time (Oinam & Umananda, 2019). Darrang had three schools run by the government and a few others privately run by end of 1835. The population of primary schools had risen to eight in 1847. Nine vernacular schools were available in the district till 1853. Starting in 1854, the province government instituted a separate education policy to Bodos of Darrang area through Christian missionaries. At the end of the nineteenth century, the districts had high schools at Gauripur, Abhayapuri, Dhubri, and Goalpara. Similar arrangements, however, were not made for the districts of Goalpara and Kamrup.

One secondary and nine primary schools existed during 1847-48 in Goalpara district. There were only 10 schools covering all grades in the Goalpara area during a visit by A. J. Moffatt Mills in 1853 (Allen et al., 1979). Company through Christian missionaries initiated specific education policy for the Bodos of Darrang area from the year 1854, and there were approximately four high schools across the districts at the late 19th century; they were situated at Goalpara, Dhubri, Abhayapuri, and Gauripur. Middle Vernacular schools existed in South Salmara, Bijni, Patamari, Goalpara, and Dhubri, while that of Middle English was in Dalgoma, Manikarchar, Bilasipara, and Manikarchar. The district possessed 16 upper and 192 lower elementary schools as per the statistics 1903-04. Some Bodos who lived along the northern bank of Brahmaputra were also enrolled in this school (Allen 2005).

However, it was not until the beginning of the 1900s that the Bodo communities developed an inclination towards the changed educational system. The parents of the Bodo tribe's students considered the school schedule to be extended and waste of time which they could have used in household chores. Also, there was no educational facility in the Bodo-inhabited areas, which added to the continued educational backwardness of the community; hence the situation had hardly changed communal life (Brahma, 2022).

➤ *Christian Missionaries' role in Education of Bodos:*

In the middle of the nineteenth century, Christian missionaries started educating and propagating the regional languages among the northeast Indian people as a conversion strategy. The funding of the government's operations in Christian missionary work was meant to support their mandate to link with different tribal groups and promote education with the tribes through the missionaries (Jenkins1985). Christian missionaries, through the education they mounted, particularly among the tribes of north-eastern India, have played a crucial role in reconstructing the collective subjectivity of tribal societies. British officials then set up schools in some areas to win the trust of the Assamese gentry. Words might also include such missionary activities among tribal communities in North-East India: those Christian missionaries who had a relatively profound access for indigenes without formal avenues of education through many governmental restrictions were involved in propagating the religion among those who are less literate. But the establishment of scripts and language-preservation efforts put forth by the missionaries has historically defined collective identities for the tribes (Brahma,2022).American Baptist Missionaries were the ones to come in contact with the Bodos when the encouragement given to Kirti Arya started in 1844. Oliver T. Cutter visited the Darrang district of Assam in December of 1841 and recognized the necessity of schools for the Bodos during his visit to Tezpur. Rev. Cyrus Barkar visited Boro villages scattered in northern Darrang during his trip to Tezpur in 1843 but had little success to report. In 1848, A.H. Danforth worked with Rev. Barkar and Ward to ease Bodo conversion through catechization and by disseminating Christian literature in the Bodo dialect. By the end of that year, most of the students at the Barker boarding school of Guwahati were from the Bodo tribe(Endle,1911). Thus, in the post-revolt period such revamped educational policies were established by the Indian government, giving rise to the mission association to now devote itself to the Bodos' cause. The Bodo Kachari Mission was founded in 1864 under the leadership of Rev. C. H. Hesselmeyer and had total renovation of the mission station for the Bodos. These were the school-the Miri people-and the twelve that were for the Bodo people-built in Darrang during the same year. The Miri people were the same year that was established,

along with the Bodo people, in Darrang in 1864. The spearhead of missionary activities among the Bodos in the Goalpara district was Lutheran Missionaries in the latter half of the 1800s. When Rev. L.O. Skrefsrud was on an evangelization round in the Goalpara district in 1887, he observed the Bodos' zeal and decided to commence a mission among the Bodo people in the same year. On January 17, 1887, Teklo Basumatary from Goalpara district was converted into the Santal Mission, becoming the first Bodo disciple of the Mission(Chakravarty,1989).

The Lutheran Missionaries started missionary work among the Bodos in the Goalpara district in the last part of the 1800s. While evangelizing at the Goalpara district in 1887, Rev. L.O. Skrefsrud discovered the passion of Bodos and was triggered to start a Bodo mission. Established in the year 1929, the Mission started a permanent Mission station and elementary school at Gaurang, close to Kokrajhar, solely for Bodo people. Later, the school was elevated into a Middle English school, and it turned up into a high school in 1947. To facilitate their work among the Bodos of other areas, they built a boarding school and a separate mission station for the Bodos in Bongaigaon in 1935 (Sarmah,2017).

➤ *Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma's contributions:*

The Brahma movement made its greatest contribution to the educational scenario of the country (Chaudhuri, 2004). Its initiator, Kalicharan Brahma, the first protagonist of history in the Brahma religion, made a significant contribution to the rebuilding of the Bodo identity and in the process of propagating the Brahmo religion, encouragement of education for the eradication of underdevelopment among Bodos was mainly focused. In the year 1906 that the Brahma Dharma was established after meeting with Sivanaryan Paramahamsa in Calcutta and offering the Yajnahuti for starting a new faith. He travelled to the remote villages and districts of West Bengal, Kamrup, Nagaon, Darrang, and Dibrugarh propagating the Brahma Dharma. The changes he brought had his mark as a significant milestone in Bodo development. This brought about a successful movement in making individuals aware of how important education is in constructing an identity and self-esteem (Brahma,2006).Educational growth and development for the Bodos were tremendously limited early in the 20th century. The document Kalicharan Brahma submitted to the Simon Commission in 1929 serves as proof of it. Because they didn't have educated people among them who could write the

reports themselves, they showed their lack of ability (Brahma, 2022). During the second decade of the twentieth century, the steady inflow of literate immigrants from Nepal and Bengal seeking jobs began to alter the situation. So, the native Bodos and the new local, small educated group captured the prominence led by Kalicharan Brahma. Education alone was considered sufficient to improve people's standing because it would enable the growth of literature and the preservation of culture and traditions (Basumatary & Daimary, 2018). He led a reform movement among the Assamese Bodos through the restructuring of their religious beliefs and subsequently convinced them of the fact that one day they would attain social equality with their peripheral societies (Roy, 1995). People living in the Bodo areas wanted schools to be built. They also knew that everyone's home environment was important for making progress, so they focused on getting rid of social evils in society. They also cared a lot about women's roles and chances to learn. This made people work together for the good of their community. In 1919, Kalicharan Brahma started the Bodo Chatra Sanmilami (The Bodo Student's Association) in Dhubri. These involved initiatives focused on enhancing the Bodos' culture, education, and language, and also on increasing job opportunities for them. This greatly helped raise people's interest in improving their community and provided a way to protect their overall development and interests (Brahma, 2001). In the year 1911, Kalicharan Brahma went to Mr. A.J. Laine, Deputy Commissioner of Goalpara, and asked to take the initiation to propagating education in unenlightened Bodo areas. Mr. Laine pursued Kalicharan Brahma's petition to Chief Commissioner of Assam Mr. Archdale Earle, who toured the Dhubri district early in 1912 for the promotion of education among the Bodos. He offered Rs.30,000 in the form of a grant for the creation of three institutions, namely: a Middle English school; a carpentry centre in Tipkai; and a weaving centre. The three institutions were collectively known as Tipkai Middle English School and Technical School. Kalicharan Brahma helped in building accommodations for the students of these schools (Mushahary, 1992). The unified action of Kalicharan Brahma and Mr. Laine had led to establishment of a primary school in the Goalpara district (Brahma, 2006). As there were more educational institutions in the Bodo-occupied areas of Goalpara district, Kalicharan Brahma made compulsory schooling for all. He not only motivated children to school but also penalized their parents who do not want them to go to school. Then, he

included provisions for scholarships to deserving students funded from public donations, thereby making schooling attractive. (Sarma, 1983).

➤ *The educational scenario of Bodo women:*

In the early years of British rule in Assam, women's education hit its lowest point because of the East India Company's policies and the traditional society's resistance to modern technology. Social rules and customs also stopped girls from getting an education. In 1837, John M. Cosh stated that the impact of education on Assamese women was very poor. People thought that educating women could be a threat to society, as it might disrupt the existing social structure. Some even had the belief that if a woman could read and write, no man would want to marry her (M'Cosh, 2000).

Bodo women's education lags behind the state average. The first girls' schools were started in Mohabhoirob (Tezpur) and Borigaon (Udalguri district) by Christian missionaries in 1870. The success, however, was rather low. Sidney Endle was interested in promoting female education especially among the Bodo of Darrang district. In 1869, Sidney Endle was informed by the Deputy Inspector of Schools about the establishment of a women's school in Kuruah, near Guwahati, but he expressed regrets that such facilities did not exist among the Bodo. He immediately brought up the matter at the Borigaon Native Christian Congregation. People happily agreed to his plan. Endle was surprised to find out that many Christian Bodo families were teaching their girls and women to read and write at home, in their own language. With help from the local people and the government, Sidney Endle started two schools for women: one in Mahabhoirob in the Tezpur area and another in Borigaon in the Mangaldai area for the Bodo people (Sarmah, 2014).

Founded in 1919, a major landmark transformation was the institution of the Bodo Charta Sanmilani. Besides, the Bodo Charta Sanmilani made education and the development of the tribe's language initial priorities for tribal development. Very little advancement was made by education during the colonial period. The Bodo traditional society had a skeptical view toward the Christian missionaries while Kalicharan Brahma's socio-religious reform movement received little attention

among his followers especially in the Goalpara area(Narzary & Mitra,2004).The Bodo guardians opposed towards girl's education as they think it is useless and to some extent inconvenient. hey greatly valued the women's role in household tasks. This was important for two reasons: first, to prepare them for their future responsibilities at home, and second, to take care of younger family members, household animals, and support their parents(Brahma,2006).

1.7 Educational scenario of Bodos post-independence

Indian Constitution is the self-expression and aspiration of the people of India itself. The Constituent Assembly recognized that growth of India's various communities is possible through equal advancement in every walk of life, particularly education. After attaining independence, the national government focused heavily on ensuring that all children could receive primary education, as stated in the Constitution. This led to a significant improvement in the education system in Assam. However, after independence, there were still differences in how easily people could access education, depending on whether they lived in rural or urban areas, their gender, and their economic or linguistic background. To ensure everyone had equal chances, there were extra challenges in improving education for tribal and other disadvantaged groups (Agarwal & Gupta, 2010). Article 21 of the Constitution ensures that all children between the ages of 6 and 14 must receive free and mandatory education. Article 29 protects the special language, writing, or cultural aspects of minority groups. Article 46 supports the education and economic needs of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and other underprivileged groups, protecting them from unfair treatment and any kind of mistreatment. Article 350A of the Constitution provides resources for teaching children from minority language groups in their native/regional language, which encourages communities.

The post-independent Assam, even if it recorded a higher degree of participation in education, did not increase uniformly and was least desirable to all areas. Despite claiming to make free and compulsory education in line with the provisions of the Constitution and the impact of the reform movements, many attempts were initiated by the state administration as regards the education of the Bodo people, who were really deprived of sufficient education for decades after

independence. In the post-colonial period, there was a strong trend of people's participation in educational development. However, the economics did not fulfil expectation in some areas. Extension in numbers regarding educational institutions or students does not always bring progress in education (Brahma,2022).The Bodo people have always fought for their desired educational standards even after independence. Economic, social, and geographical factors had set limits on their educational qualifications. However, reform movements and prominent personalities contributed to the establishment of several schools in Bodo communities; most were primary, though (Boro, 1987). The low attendance rates can also be attributed to the poverty of the time, which was coupled with the prevailing lack of interest in education-the result of a low student teacher ratio. Thus, the literacy rate remained low, and even as late as the 1970s, most Bodo were first-generation students. A contributory factor was the ignorance of the parents regarding the importance of education and also distance from the schools, especially Middle English and High English Schools. Apart from other economic and geographical implications, there was also a language barrier that was instrumental in significantly poor educational attainment as regards the average Bodo population (Bordoloi, 1991).

In Assam, there were a total of 345,983 Bodo people in 1961; among them were 124,039 males and 153,335 females who could be termed as illiterates because they had never attended school. In 1961, the rate of female literacy among Bodo in Assam was a meagre 9.3 percent, compared to 29.88 percent for males (Census of India, 1961). The incredibly low female literacy might have been affected by some conservative ideology toward the education of women until the end of the 20th century. There was a general perception that education would affect women's morality. The Bodo women were required to confine their knowledge and skills to those pertaining to daily household chores(Sarmah,2014). As per the Report of the Study Team on the Tribal Development Programme in Assam, 1966, the

Bodos are 39.29% of plains tribe population and have the lowest literacy rate at 19.83 percent(Sarmanh,2014).Bodo students faced daily punishment in schools and ultimately had to drop out of school because they could not follow the lessons in the Assamese language or in the books(Mochahary, 1993).

➤ *Introduction of Bodo as an Educational Medium*

After gaining independence, many mission schools were changed into different non-government education groups, and the state government took control of some of them. When many schools started using English as the main language for teaching, some local language primary schools became less significant (Brahma, 2006). Article 350A of the Indian Constitution guarantees children from linguistic minority communities the right to receive primary education in their mother tongue. The emergence of the Bodo language and literature and the uplift of Bodo education in Assam during the post-independent phase has been closely reflected in the constitutional provisions and government policies. The demand that Bodo be used as the medium of instruction in schools was undeniably associated with the main agenda for educational advancement for the Bodos (Brahma, 2022). The educated Bodo elite class came into the realization that the most significant prerequisite to elevate the status of the tribe is the spread of knowledge through one's own language. Thus, the Plains Tribes of Assam raised demands in 1947 for their vernacular language to be made a medium of instruction (Sarmah, 2014). A new literary group named "Bodo Sahitya Sabha" was formed on November 16, 1952, at Basugaon for the preservation of the Bodo dialect, racial identity, literacy development, and the uplifting of the plight of society. The issue and scope for incorporating the Bodo Language as a medium in primary education has actually been brought about by the Bodo Sahitya Sabha. Accordingly, on May 18, 1962, the Chief Minister Bimala Prasad Chaliha promulgated Bodo as the medium of instruction for Kokrajhar's primary schools from the academic year 1963 (Brahma, 2010). The "All Bodo Students' Union" (ABSU) was formed on the 15th of February, 1967, by the students of Goalpara. At the same time, on February 27th, 'The Plains Tribal Council of Assam' (PTCA) was born as a political party. The collective activities of these formed a fresh dimension to Bodo socio-political life, which helped in broadening the cultural and socio-political awakening of the people (Bhattacharya, 2017).

In 1972, the Bodo Sahitya Sabha started working to make the Bodo language available up to class VII. On June 27, 1973, the Assamese government recognized the Bodo language as a Modern Indian Language (MIL). In the 1976 High School

Leaving Certificate Examination (HSLC), the first group of students studying in the Bodo language medium participated. (Boro, 2007).

Bodo people's growing political consciousness, catalysed by the decision to use Bodo for primary medium of instruction, led Bodo to this campaign for a separate script for their language. The Bodos' push for a unique script for their language came from growing political awareness, which was triggered by the choice to make Bodo the main language for teaching. On April 12, 1975, in Barama, leaders of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, along with the Bodo Students Union and other teacher groups, decided to use the Devanagari script for the Bodo language to help with integration and cultural exchanges both nationally and internationally. The 16th Annual Conference of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, held in Dhing from April 25 to 27, 1975, officially adopted the Devanagari script (Narzary, 1993). Bodo Sahitya Sabha had approached the state government for an official status for the language. On May 2, 1985, the Bodo language was granted the status of associate official language within the sub-divisions of Kokrajhar and Udalguri. (Basumatary, 2008). Gauhati added Bodo as an elective subject on its curriculum for the degree courses on July 31, 1999. In fact, it had started a major course in the Bodo language to meet the growing demand of the students on January 18, 2006. Thus, this language gained recognition as an advanced subject at XI and XII standards on July 31, 2006, according to Assam Higher Secondary Education Council. All such students' advancements impacted Bodo society greatly.

The Bodo people's effort also persuaded the government to help with the growth of the Bodo language and its literature. The progress in Bodo literature resulted in its addition to the "Eighth Schedule" of the Indian Constitution on December 22, 2003, through the Ninety-Second Amendment Act of 2003. In 2005, the Sahitya Academy officially recognized the Bodo language (Boro, 2007).

➤ Bodo women participation in social movement post-Independence

The active participation of women in movements is not something new. Around the world, women are continuing with the struggle of resistance. At this point, rediscovering their role in such movements is only emerging. In the beginning, women's participation in sociopolitical activities was limited to some aspects of the affluent sections of society. Women's participation was not recognized in

societal politics. Bodo women's engagement into sociopolitical life was not organized before the coming up of "All Assam Tribal Women Welfare Federation" (AATWWF). Bodo woman had to participate under the aegis of All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) and Bodo Sahitya Shabha prior to the establishment of AATWWF. (Chaudhuri, 2004).

Upendra. Nath. Brahma, president of the ABSU, stated that the way forward for society in general is through women's empowerment. This was indeed the turning point for modern-day Bodo history. Prior to this, there were not very many women in leadership positions. Most of the emerging leaders came from educated backgrounds. Significant mention in this context deserves Pramila Rani Brahma, the first woman Bodo leader. The Women's Welfare Federation members were supposed to be involved in movement initiatives activities in 1989, and the ABSU and Bodo Volunteer Force started preparations of their members for various activities (Bhattacharyya,2017).

The AATWWF held many seminars across Assam and wrote articles about women's issues to help people understand the important part women play in changing society. They also created the first women's magazine in Bodo culture, called "SONGDAN." This magazine helped a few Bodo women begin their writing careers. Women's confidence and sense of togetherness grew stronger due to their active participation in the campaign. This also raised women's importance and status in society during that time. It directly helped more Bodo women get educated and quickly increased the number of literate women. Their confidence grew through education, and the movement gave them a chance to show their leadership skills. Some of them showed great success in this area (Chaudhuri, 2004). The educational revolution and the ABSU movement in Assam drastically transformed the political attitude of Bodo women. The movement which continued under ABSU and AATWWF, introduced some new ideas for the current generation of women. The advent of education and the ABSU movement in Assam brought about a much political transformation among the Bodo women. The movement went on with the ABSU and the AATWWF, but the new generation of women quickly absorbed the fresh ideas propagated by the forces driving the agitation(Chaudhuri,2001).

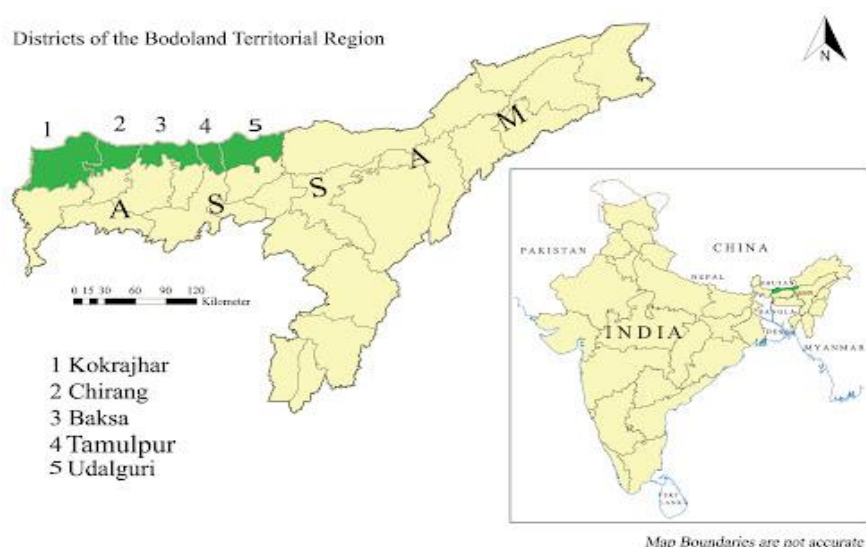
➤ *The Creation of Bodoland Territorial Region*

In 1967, Bodos demanded a separate homeland called 'Udayachal' for Assamese plain tribals under the Constitution of India(James.2023). The Bodos' demand for a separate state known as Bodoland is a product of their economic and social aspirations(George,1994). The Bodos ,since the 1930s have submitted memoranda and letters to British officials about their socio-economic and educational backwardness as well as the necessity to maintain their distinct identity from the influence of others. Deka (2014) mentions in her work related to the Bodo movement in Assam that this desire for Bodo homeland is the result of the collective memory of the old Bodo kingdom and also a seemingly distance past. History has played a significant role in interpreting the identity, which has spurred the demand for a separate Bodoland state. Hence, the demand for a separate state in Assam today is the contribution of the socio-economic underdevelopment of the community and the fast-becoming political ambition of Bodo leaders towards self-rule or self-determination.

The separatist movement gained mass popular support which translated into a violent political movement that enabled armed militancy. The demand for Bodoland gained momentum during the Assam Agitation (1979-1985) which was about concerns regarding illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. Though the leaders of the Assam Movement and the Indian government signed the Assam Accord in 1985, the concerns of the Bodo people went unaddressed. Finally, as culmination after long years of protest and discussions-the Government of India entered into Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) with All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) and Bodo People's Action Committee (BPAC)-in 1993 (Kundu,2010). The Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) was made as a result of this agreement, which led to some limited sovereignty of the Bodo people of Assam in their territory. However, some groups among the Bodo leadership continued to contest the implementation of the 1993 accord. Continued agitation and negotiations resulted in a new agreement in 2003 between the Assam Government, the Government of India and the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) to set up the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution (Deka,2014). BTC had greater powers and jurisdiction than the former Bodoland Autonomous Council.

The BTC agreement seems inadequate to meet even the minimum aspirations of Bodo people. The Bodo student organizations, literary societies, women's organizations, and several other civil societies continued to pursue their cause for demand and formation of Bodoland. This led to the signing of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) agreement in 2020. This agreement was signed between ABSU leaders and state administration and central government officials to grant more autonomy to Bodo people in self-administration and socio-economic development activities(Das,2023). At first, the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) in India had four districts: Baksa, Udalguri, Chirang, and Kokrajhar. Recently, the village of Tamulpur in the Baksa district became a new district, bringing the total number of BTR districts to five.

Figure no: 1.1 showing Map of BTR



Source link: <https://images.app.goo.gl/y1bDG8xttNzVwDs98>

1.8 Literacy rate of women in BTR

The educational status of women in the Bodoland Territorial Region is low or unsatisfactory. The female literacy rate in the BTR area is measured concerning the four districts as shown in Table 1.4. The female literacy rate has considerably increased over the years as compared to the male literacy rate. It has increased from 45.15 percent in 2001 and 59.70 percent in 2011, respectively. However, it remained low against the male literacy rate in the Bodoland Territorial Region where the male literacy rate of BTR were 64.77 percent in 2001 and 74.28 percent in 2011. The

following table represents the male-female and gender gap between the literacy in the Bodoland territorial Council during the period of 2001 and 2011.

Table 1.5 : showing the literacy of male and female in BTR of 2001 and 2011

	2001 (Literacy rate)		Gap 2001	2011 (Literacy rate)		Gap 2011
	Male	Female	Male- Female	Male	Female	Male- Female
Kokrajhar	61.01%	43.06%	17.95	73.44%	59.54%	13.90
Baksa	70.30%	48.33%	21.99	78.55%	62.23%	16.32
Udalguri	65.94%	46.34%	19.60	73.79%	59.17%	14.62
Chirang	61.82%	42.87%	18.95	71.35%	57.87%	13.48
Average	64.77%	45.15%	19.62	74.28	59.70	14.58

Source: Statistical Handbook BTR 2011, Population Census (India), Assam

According to the 2001 census, the average difference in literacy rates between men and women in these four districts was 19.62 percent. The 2011 census data, however, shows a surprising decrease in this gap to 14.58 percent. While this is an improvement, it is still not enough to match the rest of the country. This indicates that the literacy rate for women in the Bodoland Territorial Region is still lower than men in the region.

1.9 Perception of Women Towards Education:

Education provides a basis for empowerment, social mobility, and economic stability and a foundation for individual and societal development. However, the perception of education, especially for women, varies greatly due to cultural, socio-economic, and geographic factors. For that reason, understanding how women perceive education is an important step towards addressing the problems and promoting gender equality in education. Education has a significant role in boosting the self-esteem and decision-making capabilities of women. According to Kabeer (2018), education empowers women with critical thinking skills and confidence, making them put forward their voice their opinions and participate actively in community and national development.

However, the perception of women towards education is influenced by deeply rooted sociocultural norms and traditional barriers.

Traditionally, women's education has been influenced by the sociocultural context and structures of society. For a long period of time, a majority of top social paradigms put women in nurturing roles which purpose focused on the house, so there was no reason for any education relative to their social functions. On the contrary, advocates of gender equality have consistently called for the need to teach women because it is a crucial part of the overall social development process (Nussbaum, 2011).

Despite the progress achieved, disparities are still present. In many societies, education continues to be considered a male's privilege, determining women's possibilities of accessing educational opportunities. Understanding the perceptions requires entering into individual and collective experiences and the historical, economic, and cultural contexts within which they developed.

1.9.1 Factors Influencing Women's Perception towards education

- *Cultural Norms and Traditions:* Cultural expectations greatly affect the perception and attitude of women towards education. In patriarchal societies, the traditional roles usually prioritize early marriage and household responsibilities of girls/women over formal education (UNESCO, 2021). For example, in most rural communities, education is seen as secondary to preparing women for domestic roles, which is a barrier to academic progress. However, changing attitudes of society toward gender equality have drastically changed the view of education for women in many parts of the world. Women's rights movements and educational access movements have greatly influenced the perception of these attitudes. According to Subrahmanian (2019), "community-level advocacy is essential in promoting positive attitudes toward women's education."
- *Economic Factors:* Economic conditions also greatly influence perception. In poverty-stricken households, the expenses of education are combined with the opportunity cost of not working, which discourages investment in female education (Hunt, 2008). Moreover, households may prefer investing in the

education of sons who are perceived to be future income earners, as opposed to girls whose education is seen as a less profitable investment.

- *Parental Influence:* Parental attitudes toward education play a crucial role. Various researches have revealed that educated parents, especially mothers, value and support their daughters' education more than others (Brown & Park, 2002). In families that highly value education, women will more likely find education as the tool for individual and professional growth. On the other hand, in families with rigid traditional gender roles, women will more likely perceive education as something unnecessary or unattainable. Parents with lower level of formal education usually underestimate the transformative potential of education, thereby continuing cycles of underinvestment in women's education. Study by Banerjee and Duflo (2011) states that 'parents education and socioeconomic status significantly impact girls' educational aspirations and perceptions.'
- *Social and Institutional Support:* Supportive structures or infrastructures including scholarships, appointing female mentors/teachers, and gender-responsive education policies can influence the way women think about education. In many developing countries, for instance, conditional cash transfer programs for girls' education have enhanced enrolment rates and changed societal views (Evans et al., 2020).
- *Personal aspirations and experiences:* The past experiences and aspirations of women are also crucial determinants of attitudes toward education. Women who have felt the transforming power of education are likely to support its significance and motivate others to seek education. However, women who were discriminated or systemically deprived of education often develop negative perceptions. According to Stromquist (2015), personal agency and self-efficacy play an important role in the development of positive attitudes towards education.

1.9.2 Positive Perceptions and Their Implications:

Education in most parts of the world is viewed by women as empowerment and self-sufficiency. Education of women tends to encourage decision-making and autonomy in monetary matters and resistance against patriarchal traditions (Malhotra

et al., 2016). All these have an aggregate impact that goes further to boost the health status of families, diminish poverty levels, and facilitate the growth of a community.

For instance, in the case of Indian metropolitan cities, young females see education as a means for professional fulfilment as well as escape from socio-economic bondage (Ramachandran, 2010). The changed notion is further boosted by the awareness of the visible successful female icons in every arena.

Despite the barriers, women generally have a positive perception about education, as they realize it as an empowerment and a means of social mobilization. Inspiring stories about women who have braved many obstacles to ensure successful educational and professional endeavours represent a strong motivator for others. The advocacy about girls' education led by Malala Yousafzai has so inspired millions of women around the world to pursue their education despite social and systemic barriers.

Studies reveal that women who perceive education as positive are more likely to invest in their children's education, thus creating the ripple effect to benefit future generations. According to Sen (2000), the ripple effects of women's education are profound enough to cause intergenerational effects that improve the health, economic, and social well-being of entire communities.

1.9.3 Enhancing Women's Perception towards Education:

The perception of education among women needs to be improved for societal progress, as educated women are important contributors to economic growth, health improvements, and overall well-being. This requires a multi-dimensional approach that addresses cultural, social, and economic barriers. In order to reshape the perceptions of education among women, it is necessary to remove structural and cultural barriers through focused interventions:

➤ 'Challenging Gender Norms and Cultural Barrier: '

Traditional cultures tend to uphold deep-rooted gender roles that lead to a de-emphasis of educating women. Such deep-seated norms need massive trainings in comprehensive gender-equality skills and community involvement. Teachers' professional development through practice change programs would mean a stronger reinforcement in the provision of gender equity in education. This, in turn, boosts whole-school change in relations with parents and communities, where the environment of girls' education will be valued and supported (*17 Ways to Improve Girls' Education*, 2016).

➤ *‘Ensuring Safe and Accessible Educational Environments’:*

Safety concerns and accessibility issues have greatly affected the participation of women in education. It is important to make schools safe, welcoming, and accessible. This includes secure routes to schools, adequate sanitation facilities, and a learning environment free from harassment and discrimination. In this way, schools become inviting spaces for women, with increased enrolment and retention rates (Kanungo et al.2023).

➤ *‘Promoting Early and Continuous Enrolment:’*

Early admission and continued involvement in education are crucial for long-term empowerment of women. To ensure that girls enrol in school on time and continue their education, systemic change is required. This includes the implementation of universal foundational skills at the national level because these foundational skills are what eventually lead to more complex learning and personal development Voigt and Spies (2020).

➤ *‘Facilitating School-to-Work Transitions:’*

It is through education and employment, two important sectors that have to be bridged, that women's perception towards education's value will be improved. In this regard, enhancing cross-sector collaboration involving educational institutions and the labour market leads to smoother transitions from school to work. Setting policies and interventions in alignment with gender norms would ensure that women are not only educationally equipped but also empowered in the workforce and take up more economic burden and societal role for themselves (Shelby, C. & Evans, D.2022).

➤ *‘Implementing Multifaceted Support Systems’:*

Women often face several intersecting barriers that prevent them from pursuing their education. Such multifaceted solutions are very important in solving these various challenges. This ranges from financial aid, mentorship programs, and flexible learning opportunities tailored to women's needs. Data collection of these vulnerabilities would allow for focused interventions, ensuring that support systems would reach the most vulnerable areas (Shelby, C. & Evans, D.2022).

➤ *‘Highlighting the Transformative Power of Education:’*

The more educated a woman is, the less likely she is to get married at an early age. They lead healthy, productive lives and have a better future, with better

income levels and being able to make decisions affecting their lives. Investments in girls' education change communities, countries, and the whole world(UNICEF).

Therefore, improving women's perception of education requires a holistic approach to challenge the current gender norms, provide safe and accessible learning environments, encourage early and continuous enrolment, make transitions to the workforce easy, and establish multifaceted support systems. In this manner, societies will empower women to realize and utilize the transformative power of education for the benefit of wider social and economic interests.

1.10 Theoretical framework of the study:

The attainment of education among tribal women, like Bodo women, is affected by various social, psychological, and feminist ideas. The path to education for these women is strongly shaped by a web of social, cultural, and structural influences. By looking at these issues through different theoretical viewpoints, researchers can gain a clearer understanding of the challenges these women face in getting an education and how their perception is shaped towards education. Here is a brief analysis at the theories that are important for this study.

- I. Human Capital Theory: According to Becker (1993), human capital theories proclaim education as an investment in people's productive capabilities and, consequently, economic returns. This theory is crucial to analyse how tribal women perceive education in improving the socio-economic condition. Education boosts employability, thus empowering tribal women to resist the systemic inequalities that exist. However, other factors limit them, like poverty, early marriages, and limited educational infrastructure for access.
- II. Intersectionality Theory: The intersectional theory as propounded by Kimberlé Crenshaw is indicative of how the overlapping identities of an individual-such as gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status-shape experiences of marginalization in society (Crenshaw, 1989). Tribal women live at the junction of multiple oppressions such as patriarchy, ethnic discrimination and economic marginalization. For instance, a Bodo woman might have to deal with the fact that the schools she attends use a language that she doesn't understand properly, such as Assamese or English. These various intersecting

disadvantages create unique challenges that require specific solutions. The theory also explains how the perceptions of tribal women regarding education are directly influenced by the social position that they occupy in society. Some may regard education as a source of empowerment, while others may see it as being alien to their lives because they are not included in the system.

- III. Ecological Systems Theory: Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is an ideal framework to examine how different systems, such as a microsystem (family), mesosystem (community), exosystem (institutions), and macrosystem (policy and culture), interact with each other to inform a person's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In the case of tribal women, family attitude and community norms, in addition to school environment, would be extremely critical elements for such women in accessing education. For example, while a supportive family may motivate a girl to continue her education, the community that considers women's primary roles as domestic may not support it. Macrosystem factors include government aid in the form of scholarships or mid-day meal programs, which can lessen some of the structural disadvantages. This theory underscores the interconnectedness of these systems in shaping both constraints and perceptions.
- IV. Feminist Standpoint Theory: Sandra Harding's feminist standpoint theory holds that those population groups who are marginalized, including women, hold special perspectives created through their lived experiences (Harding, 2004). The educational experiences and restrictions of tribal women are closely connected to the gendered realities of their lives. This theory presents a compelling argument for listening to their voices regarding what they think of education-not simply as something for personal gain, but as potential to even able to disrupt traditional power ordering. Their narratives or stories shows how cultural traditions, family duties, and social expectations either help or hinder their educational aspirations.
- V. Critical Pedagogy: Paulo Freire's approach to Critical Pedagogy focuses on using education as a way to liberation and empower people (Freire, 1970). For tribal women, who often don't have a say in important decisions, education can help them understand their situation better. For instance, being able to read and learn can help them see and fight against unfair practices like child marriage or unequal pay. Freire's ideas show how education can bring

significant changes when everyone can take part and feel included. But if education isn't available or doesn't relate to their real lives, it could actually make them feel less powerful instead of helping them gain freedom.

Through these theories, the study attains a broader understanding of the educational experience of tribal women. It shows how structural and cultural constraints interact to determine access to education and the valuation of education. These theories also represent the need for policies and interventions on systemic inequities designed with a sensitivity toward the unique contexts and voices of tribal women.

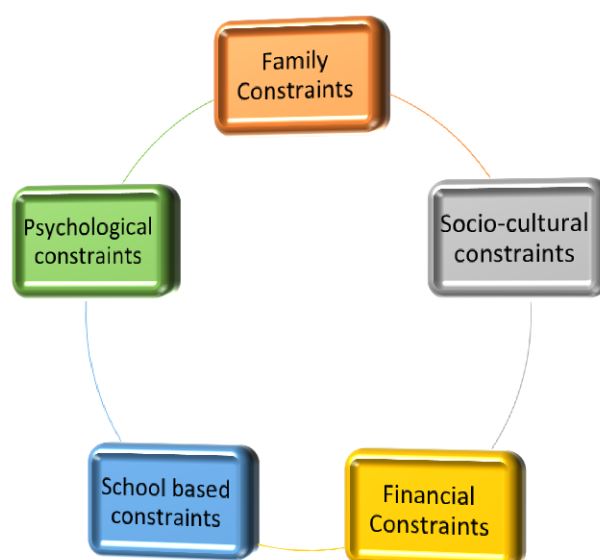
1.11 Conceptual framework of the study

This study develops a conceptual framework for analysing the educational experiences of Bodo women while focusing on the constraints they faced as well as the perception they developed towards education. By combining dimensions drawn from a number of theoretical frameworks, this framework provides an analytic lens through which the multifaceted challenges and attitudes of Bodo women toward education can be examined. This study's conceptual framework is organized along two primary sections: constraints towards education of Bodo women and perceptions of Bodo women towards education.

The first part focuses on the constraints towards Bodo women's education, which includes family, socio-cultural, financial, school-based, and psychological barriers (shown in Figure 1.2). Family constraints are particularly significant, as women are primarily responsible for domestic work and caregiving. These responsibilities, added by societal expectations such as early marriage and child-rearing, restrict their opportunities for formal education. Patriarchal attitudes within families prioritize boys' education over girls', further perpetuating gender disparities. Socio-cultural constraints also play a significant role, as traditional beliefs often do not value women's education. In most tribal societies cultural norms sets women primarily as caregivers, which leads to the perception that formal education is unnecessary for fulfilling this role. Moreover, other community pressures such as rituals and celebrations divert attention and resources away from education. Another very critical factor that determines the education of tribal women is economic constraints. Many families in tribal areas find it difficult to pay even school fees,

uniforms, or acquire the necessary learning materials for their children. School-based challenges, like poor facilities, unsafe travel, and limited resources, make these problems worse. Schools in rural and tribal areas often don't have basic amenities like separate toilets for girls or culturally appropriate lessons, which can make tribal students feel left out. Also, unfavourable attitude of teachers and the lack of female teachers can stop young tribal students from continuing their studies. Psychological constraint, caused by being treated unfairly, also affect the education of tribal women. Low self-confidence, fear of not doing well, and internalised society's expectations can hinder their aspiration for higher education. Experiences of being excluded and discrimination further demotivate them and affect their confidence.

Figure no:1.2 Constraints towards education of Bodo women

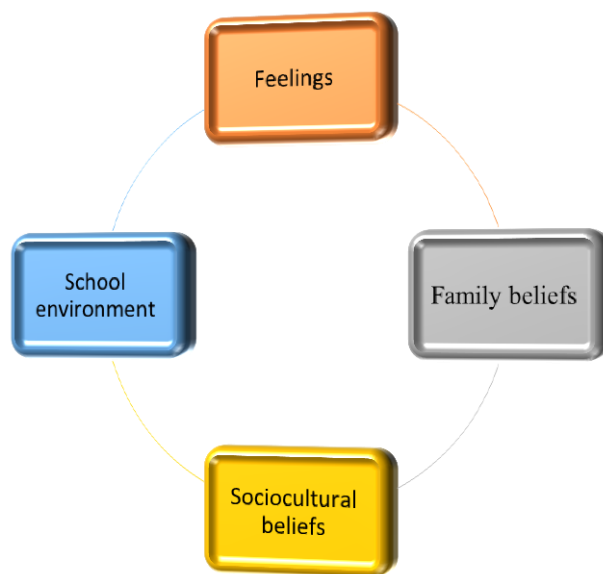


Secondly, the comprehension of how constraints shapes perceptions is very important for confronting educational problems experienced by the Bodo women. In this study, the four dimensions, which was used to explore their perception regarding education ,were identified These are Feelings, Family beliefs, Socio-cultural beliefs and School environment(shown in Figure 1.3).

The ways in which tribal women express their emotions concerning educational experiences becomes important when one attempts to understand their perceptions. Feelings associated with achievement might bring a woman to feel joy or pride, and

those related to barriers experienced within a system or unmet aspirations may cause frustration or disappointment. Beliefs of family are one of those factors that influence perceptions; supportive families motivate aspirations, while conservative families course restrict it. Socio-cultural beliefs derived from the various cultural narratives existing within tribal communities, determine to a great extent how education is valued. Some tribal women understand education as empowerment; others think it irrelevant concerning their traditional roles. The school environments also shape perceptions of education. Positive experiences from inclusive and supportive schools motivate students, while practices of exclusion cultivate negative attitudes toward education.

Figure no :1.3 showing perception of Bodo women towards education



This conceptual framework provides a wide-ranging structure for examining the constraints and perceptions of tribal women in education. This provides insights for developing specific interventions for enhanced access, participation, and success in educational endeavours among tribal women.

1.12 Rationale of the study

When it comes to education, tribal communities in India are much less advanced compared to other communities. Literacy, is very important for the progress of these tribal groups (Chowdhury et al,2022). Tribal communities are among the poorest, most economically deprived, and socially marginalized populations; and their women are among the most disadvantaged in relation to men (Sen & Barik,2020). Many people in rural India are very poor and live in very difficult conditions, as shown by many studies. Even though India has been independent for 66 years and the government has tried different plans and laws to help people in tribal areas improve their lives over the past 63 years, the living conditions of tribal people in haven't really gotten better(Nayak,2013).

The dual obligations suffered by women in India remain within family and outside it. The economic function of women, even in Indian tribal families, is of great importance within the family and society. The idea that while women have little control over material or resources, their significant participation in basic subsistence activity leads to a high status for them. Contributions to subsistence economy have given them a significant position in their societies (Bhattacharya & Murmu,2019). Tribal women have a lower status compared to both tribal men and women in the general population. Their situation is marked by high birth rates, poor nutrition, lack of education, excessive work, and the influence of exploitative sexual market forces within tribal communities (Panigrahi 2017).

Socioeconomic status and culture are often influential in the education of a child, especially the education of a girl child. "Factors impeding girl's education include poverty, low income of both parents, low level of education among parents, early marriage, preference for boy children, religious factors, household chores assigned to girls, child betrothal, child fosterage, and polygyny." (Alhassan,2010). Some parents are primitive when it comes to education deciding for their children. Some parents do not send their daughters to school in spite of modern civilization in the world. For most tribal communities, it is culturally perceived that, it is a waste of time as well as expenses to educate a girl since she will be married and taken away to another family, thus making the education worthless for her parents' family.

The Bodo women of Assam have faced various difficulties and issues since early times. In the Baksa district, women faced gender discrimination and most women are unhappy with the unfair treatment they receive from their families and communities. Most women feel completely overlooked by the male-dominated society. Even though there are many laws and provisions made to protect women's right, they still have to deal with many problems and issues (Baishya, 2017).

The study focuses on the Bodoland Territorial Region in Assam because the Bodos are the largest plain tribes in Assam and census data indicate that there prevails a huge gap in education between male and female, within Bodoland Territorial Region of Assam. And it's crucial to understand the educational status, constraints they faced and their perception towards education of women. Education is a key factor in improving women's status in society. So, it's important to explore women's approach towards their education.

The education status of Bodo women represents an area of study critical in dimensions that further reflect the wider societal dynamics and intersectionality of gender, culture, and education within the tribal context. Education is the means to empowerment, and in terms of Bodo women, systemic obstacles continue to put it beyond their reach and effect. These barriers often stem from deeply rooted socio-economic issues, cultural norms and traditions, and inadequate infrastructure, leading to disparities in educational attainment. This study is essential because it prioritizes understanding education from the perspective of Bodo women as it provides an authentic narrative of their experiences, aspirations, and struggles. Their perceptions elucidate the ways through which they navigate constraints such as early marriage, financial challenges and social pressures while aspiring for their education, while they can also bring to light other critical aspects. By focusing on these perceptions, the study captures both the barriers and the resistances and aspirations of Bodo women.

Targeting the narration of Bodo women would ensure that the research is in align with participatory and inclusive methodologies so that lived realities of Bodo women will guide policy recommendations. This study provides a complete way to look at the constraints and perception or attitude of Bodo women in relation to education. It examines family, social, cultural, financial, school, and psychological obstacles, as well as understand their perception towards education. The aim is to give a detailed understanding of what affects Bodo women's education. This knowledge can help to

understand and provide suggestions to improve access, involvement, and development in education for Bodo women. Findings of the study will leverage in effecting culturally sensitive interventions and strengthening education policies. Ultimately, this research seeks to promote educational equity, contributing to their empowerment and fostering sustainable development within the Bodo community.

1.13 Significance of the study:

The main significance of the study is discussed as under:

- The study analyses the specific constraints faced by Bodo women of BTR in accessing education and providing valuable understanding into the challenges they encounter.
- It explores how Bodo women perceive education, and helping to understand the influence of their emotional, cultural and societal experiences on their views towards education of women.
- The concern of gender-specific challenges is included in the research contributions, which provide efforts to reduce disparities in education for tribal women.
- The outcomes can be useful for policymakers in the formulation of educational policies that are more-inclusive and culturally sensitive towards the tribal communities.
- It recommends educational institutions for the creation of supportive school environments and culturally appropriate curricula.
- The study focuses on emphasising the transformative potential of education, thus, encouraging stakeholders to invest in initiatives that empower tribal women.
- It offers practical advice for families, community leaders, non-governmental organizations, and government agencies to work together to address obstacles to education of tribal women.
- Rural Bodo women are the primary beneficiaries the study as it highlights their challenges and perception, which can help shape policies and programs to improve their access to education and real opportunities.

1.14 Statement of the problem:

Despite significant efforts to promote education in India, tribal women still have to face challenges in accessing and completing their education. Among the Bodo community, these challenges are multiplied by intersecting factors such as socio-cultural norms, economic hardships, and institutional barriers. Family expectations, traditional ideas about gender, and early marriages often stop tribal women from getting an education, which limits their chances for personal growth and helping their community.

In addition to these constraints, the perception of education among Bodo women remains underexplored. Their attitudes are shaped by their lived experiences, which may include systemic exclusion, alienation within mainstream educational systems, and a lack of culturally relevant curricula. Understanding such perceptions will take one closer to addressing the root causes of such low educational attainment and guide one in designing appropriate intervention strategies.

The issue goes beyond the obstacles that prevent access to education as it also involves the limited understanding of how Bodo women see education as a way to empowerment. This research aims to investigate the challenges Bodo women face in getting an education and the perception they form from their experiences. The main aim is to gain insights that can help improve policies and practices, ensuring fair educational opportunities for everyone.

Hence, the statement of the problem has been entitled a “*Education of Bodo women in Bodoland Territorial Region of Assam.*”

1.15 Research questions:

After going through various related literature in the context, the following research questions have been raised in researcher’s mind. The research questions are-

1. What is the present status of education amongst Bodo women in Bodoland Territorial Region of Assam?
2. What are the factors that acts as constraints in education of Bodo women in Bodoland territorial region of Assam?

3. What is the perception of Bodo women towards education in Bodoland territorial region of Assam?
4. What are the suggestions that we can provide with respect to education of Bodo Women in Bodoland territorial region of Assam?

1.16 Objectives of the study:

1. To study the present status of education amongst Bodo women in Bodoland Territorial Region of Assam.
2. To study the factors that acts as constraints in Education of Bodo Women in Bodoland Territorial Region of Assam.
3. To study the perception of Bodo women towards education in Bodoland Territorial Region of Assam.
4. To provide suggestions with respect to education of Bodo Women in Bodoland Territorial Region of Assam.

1.17 Operational definition

The researcher has provided a clear definition for all terms which are used for the study, as follows:

- *Education*: Education means the process of teaching or learning, especially in a school or college, is education. In the study, education is the level of formal education one has so far received. It means those women who have attained at least basic education and cannot be classed as illiterates or never attended school in their life.
- *Bodo women*: In this study, Bodo women mean the women belonging from Bodo tribe ranging from the age group of 18 to 45 years from remote villages of Bodoland territorial region of Assam.
- *Bodoland Territorial Region* :Bodoland, officially the Bodoland Territorial Region, is an autonomous region in Assam, Northeast India. Bodo constitute the largest community in the region numbering around 1 million (31%). According to census 2011, total population of (BTR)Bodo Territorial Region which comprises of 4 districts is 3155359. In 2022,one more districts has been added making it to a total of Five districts .In this 3 districts is considered for the study, Hence BTR means the 3 districts ,namely, Kokrajhar, Baksa and Udalguri.

1.18 Delimitations of the study

- The study is delimited to only BTR of Assam.
- The study is delimited to 3 districts of BTR.
- This study is delimited to only the remote villages of BTR.
- The study is delimited to only women of from age of 18 to 45 years.
- The study is delimited to those women who have at least basic education.