

**WOMEN AND LAND RIGHTS IN NORTH EAST INDIA:  
A STUDY ON THE BODO COMMUNITY OF ASSAM**

THESIS SUBMITTED TO NAGALAND UNIVERSITY IN  
FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR  
THE AWARD OF  
**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**BY**  
**SUMI NARZARY**  
Ph.D./GEO/00166



**DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY**  
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**NAGALAND UNIVERSITY**  
**H.Q. LUMAMI**

**2025**

**WOMEN AND LAND RIGHTS IN NORTH EAST INDIA: A  
STUDY ON THE BODO COMMUNITY OF ASSAM**

**BY**

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**Submitted**

**In fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Geography of Nagaland University**

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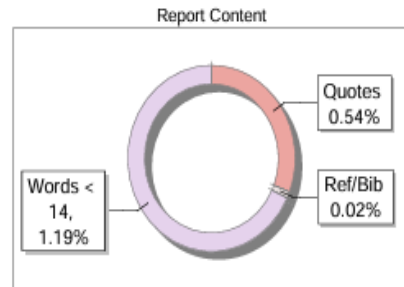
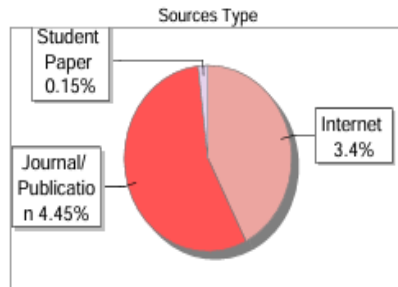
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*Sumi Narzary.*  
Sumi Narzary

Signature of the candidate

## **List of Abbreviations**

Abou- Grand Father in Bodo.

Abwi- Grand Mother in Bodo.

Aiwi- Mother in Bodo.

Afa- Father in Bodo.

Ada- Brother in Bodo.

Adwi- Paternal/maternal Younger Uncle in Bodo.

Aiyong- Paternal/maternal Elder Uncle in Bodo.

Amai/Mama- Paternal/maternal Elder Uncle in Bodo.

Anwi- Paternal/maternal Elder Aunty in Bodo.

Madwi- Paternal/maternal Younger Aunty in Bodo.

Aiyong henjao- Paternal/maternal Elder Uncle in Bodo.

Bwrai Bathwo/Bathou- It's the religion followed by Bodo people. It is associated with the five elements of nature such as Air, Sun, Earth, Fire and Sky.

Haa- Land/Earth.

San-Sun.

Baar- Air.

Okhrang- Sky.

Orr- Fire.

Bakrhri- Traditional rice store house.

Sijwo/Sijou plant- Sacred plant used for worship in Bathwo religion. Scientific name- Euphorbia Splendens.

B.T.A.D.- Bodoland Territorial Area Districts.

B.T.C.- Bodoland Territorial Council.

B.T.R.- Bodoland Territorial Region.

Taat sal/ Taat salkhunta- Tool or wooden manual machine used for weaving cloths.

Haa bhaag- Portion of land.

Dokhona- Bodo traditional dress worn by women.

Jwmgra/Saadwr- Traditional Scarf worn by women along with Dokhona.

Gamsa- Bodo dress worn by men.

Aronai- Traditional Bodo scarf generally used to pay owner to the guest.

Jwo- Local rice beer.

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**Library visit in different educational institution for secondary data collection.**

- 1) Krishnakanta Hendiqui Library, Gauhati University.
- 2) Central Library, Sikkim University.
- 3) Daulat Ram College Library, Delhi University.
- 4) Rajib Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh Central Library.
- 5) Nagaland University Central Library, Nagaland.

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## **CHAPTER- 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Geography is a discipline that studies about the spatial distribution of elements that directly or indirectly relates to the human-nature relationships. The historic journey of Geography can be traced back from the great contributions from Greeks, Romans, and Arabs. The discipline was induced broadly in discovering new places through voyages. Expeditions and explorations in different lands were the prime focus, along with understanding the main aspects of Geography is the human-nature relationship. Traditionally, Geography was a masculine and labour intensive discipline, where most of the contributors were male scholars as per mentioned by Living Stone's work, 'The Geographical Traditions' (1992).

Geography had been through several challenges to maintain its existence as a discipline. The introduction of the quantitative revolution in Geography has put forward a drastic transformation in the entire outlet of the discipline. Despite of Geography being a male dominant discipline, several female contributors like Ellen C. Semple came forward with their work as a follower of deterministic approach in Geographical study. The pace of female contributors increased relatively and could able to acquire memberships in the Scottish Royal Geographical Society in 1884 (SRGS) and in initial entry to Royal Geographical Society in United Kingdom in 1892 (RGS) and in American Association of Geographers in (1904) where there were only two female members out of 48 total members.

The quest for equal position as an active contributor was increasing the temperature high among the female Geographers. During 1925, four female Geographers namely Marguerite Harrison, Blair Niles, Gertrude Shelby and Gertrude Emerson Sen founded a group and named as Society of Women Geographers SWG. Several movements under the shade of SWG have upraised the notion of quest for equal opportunity for women. Such movements have bound to bring changes in the rigid ideologies of Geography and to be more flexible. Development planning was

the first sector of work as a sub discipline of Geography was given to the women because it was having less public exposure and safety based on gender.

Gender geography later on came into existence and is relatively a recent discourse in the history of Geography. It is an approach within human geography. It evolved out of the movements, feminist academic interventions and expansion of gender discrimination during 1960's and 1970's. The history of Gender Geography consists of three phases-

1) 1<sup>st</sup> phase- 1970's. It considers Liberal Feminist Movement, in which there should be equality between men and women in both public and private space. Example- Right to vote.

2) 2<sup>nd</sup> phase- 1980's. It considers the economic freedom to work in the public space. It is influenced by radical Socialist/Marxist trends. Example- Equality in workspace, equal wage.

3) 3<sup>rd</sup> phase- 1990's and onwards. It considers the contemporary era where the rigid binary construction male/female started to be flexible. It is influenced by Post-Structural Feminism. Example- Broader social and cultural understanding by creating opportunities for women.

In the Indian context, conceptually women are given an ideal position, yet in practices the scenario does not seem to be as suitable as it should be. As per the history of Indian social structure, the country has a patriarchal society, predominantly controlled by men. In minority, there are certain pockets of region where the matrilineal society still prevails led by women. In general, women in India are often considered to be more as an emotional, soft, motherly natured, home maker and a reproductive entity. Whereas, men are considered to be the head of the family, a rational thinker, reliable, responsible and decision maker in both public and private space.

Earlier and relatively in the present, in certain areas female are not considered to be capable enough to make decisions and were also not allowed to interrupt in decision making. Women are bind in the socially constructed outlet of the society

favourable for men. Indian women consider themselves to be the entity of their society, they often sets back when it comes in attaining equality and rights.

Although in the present day context, the condition of women is uprising, in comparison to the past few decades. Several legal section and rights are being passed from the Parliament of India, yet the concepts of traditionalism have not been through enough changes. Women still has to face restrictions from the family (private space) and obligation from the society (public space) in attaining several rights, despite of the issued legal sections. One of the biggest issues for a woman is to attain equal rights in property and land ownership. Though India is a signatory to many UN declarations such as Universal Declaration of Human Rights, (UDHR) 1948; the Convention of Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) etc. Indian women continue to be marginalised, discriminated and violated within their own society and in the larger national context as well.

Land attributes the solid earth surface which provides the very basis of the global Bio diversity as well as human basic survival (Goodall, 1987). Of all the natural resources Land occupies unique position as it holds the entire natural factor required for mankind. In geographical understanding, land includes both physical as well as human elements. Land in a fundamental sense is the most valuable endowment of nature. Importance of land in a historical perspective may be traced to the time when early man first began to utilise land for his livelihood.

Land during that time had a two dimensional use since only the area for pastures, agriculture and settlement. A third dimension was added since the Industrial Revolution when the minerals beneath the surface of the earth acquired much importance (Chakraborty, 2004). In the world view of the tribals, the concept of land is not just confined to as resource or wealth, but it is viewed as cultural, economic, and political as well as religious. According to United Nations Development Programme report noted that Indigenous people often have a special relationship with the land, for many it is still their source of livelihood and sustenance and the basis of their existence as communities, (UNDP, 2004). Geography deals with the resource management, distribution and also the ownership since the time

immemorial. In many part of the world such resource management and distribution based on gender and sectarian identity has been questioned in the modern feminist discourses.

North East India is a land of several tribal communities comprising of various diverse social, cultural, religious structures and practices. North East India consists of eight states namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim. All the states of NE India except Assam are considered as tribal states as per the government of India with certain privileges with regards to resource utilisation, property and land ownership.

As mentioned earlier, land is not just a resource of livelihood for the tribal people. Whereas, land is their source of attaining ultimate identity, which will represent them to be different in the crowd. In the tribal societies land has been the central issue for their cultural identity, social and economic lives at the same time land has been the contentious issues for most of the conflicts between communities, villages, families and gender. According to Ray, One of the important characteristics of a tribal community is the traditional association with a territory (Ray, 2011).

Most of the tribal communities in NE India have patriarchal society, yet with certain tribal norms and systems which vary from one community to the other. Regardless of such tribal norms the influence from the other adjacent non tribal community can be observed. In NE India, Khasi and Garo communities of Meghalaya are predominantly renowned as they follow the norms of a matrilineal society.

The tribal communities of India are different from the rest of the country in various ways, may it be in the social set up, cultural and religious practises, economic activities and political ideology. The views of the tribal communities towards their female half of the society is considered to be more inclined and liberal as compare to the non tribal communities. Such an inclination is because of the resource associability and the value of land and resources. In many of the tribal communities the property, land, economic controls are equal among men and women. But despite of having such inclination there too still prevail the issues

around the ownership of land and other land rights might be relatively lesser in rate in comparison to the rest of the India.

Bodos are the ethnic, linguistic and the largest sub branch community of the Kachari Group and is a dominant as well as indigenous tribal group of the northern valleys of the mighty river Brahmaputra in Assam. Bodo community unlike the other tribal communities of North-East India has a close and integral relationship with land. Among the Bodos, land has been given a specific position in terms of religion and socio-cultural perspective as a Goddess of land namely “Bwiswmuti” and based on that one of clans has been named as “Basumatary” as they were the land holders (Endle, 1911). The socio-cultural tradition of the community has been through several changes since the past being influenced by both the norms of patriarchy and modernisation which in both ways the presence of gender biasness and some proportion of equality in minor cases.

In traditional Bodo culture women does not have the right to own a land. Bodo women were only given the unstable fragile products in the name of property, such as handloom items to weave ‘Dokhona’, ‘Jwmgra’ Bodo women attire, battle nuts shares, vegetable shares, shares of agricultural products and livestock. Being influenced by patriarchy it also affects its social structure thereby creating unbalanced, bias and disparity between men and women in all social, political and economic aspects on the basis of gender. Such practices create uncertainty for the future of Bodo women and the community in general. Although with the passes of time, there were several changes in the social customs with regards to property rights, yet the proportion is very minimal.

The issues of land right and land ownership are of great interest to talk about in the present day context round the world. Worldwide many feminist activists are demonstrating to let women considered as equal to men and have equal rights to land and property as well. Women and land right issue has been encountered during the land reform programme in India after independence. Kerala and West Bengal were the first two states of the country to have an action regarding the property and land rights amongst the woman.

The land right issue is not only prevalent in the entire country in isolation, but it also has its influence in the tribal societies of North East India as well as the Bodo community in various ways. The resource availability of traditional social customs of Bodo community is very less. There is no such concrete written manuscript associated with such instances which has been diluted over the years as per the conveniences of people and situation. Thus, a proper study is required to know and understand issues around the women and land right of traditional Bodo system and the changes that it has been through over time. Such study can also provide awareness and possible preventive measure before the gender issues widens its influence in the community.

### **1.1 STUDY AREA**

The proposed study is an attempt to have an overview in the entire North Eastern Region of India, consisting of eight states namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura respectively. The work is associated with the study of tribal communities of North-East India and their land relations in general and gender in particular.

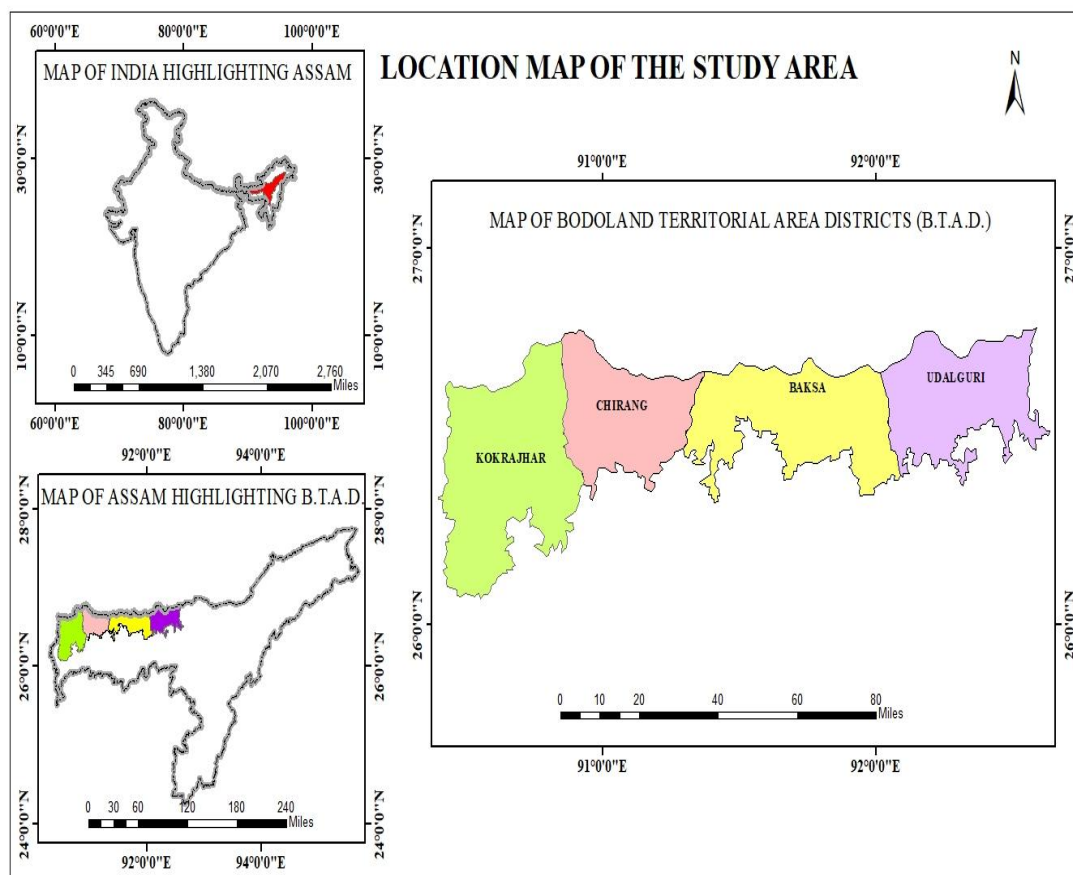
However, specifically the main focus of the study area will be on the four districts of Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (B.T.A.D.) of Assam namely Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa, and Udalguri respectively. B.T.A.D. was formed in 2003. The total area of B.T.A.D. is around 8822 sq.km. The coordinates extend between 26°7'12"N to 26°47'50"N Latitude and 89°47'40"E to 92°18'30"E Longitude, has been selected as the area of study. The total population of the four districts is 31,38,805 (2011, Census). The study area is an abode of the Bodos, mainly identified as the largest tribal community of Assam.

The above mentioned area has been selected for the study on the basis of having highest concentration of Bodo population with a view to get the most relevant and authentic information for the undertaken research. The area has been selected based on its Geographical location and Political boundaries with West Bengal in the

west of Kokrajhar district as well as the International boundary with Bhutan in the entire four districts of the study area of B.T.A.D.

The district of Chirang and Baksa has a mixture of various communities especially Bengali, Koch Rajbangsi and also the other religious groups. The district of Udalguri has the major influence of Assamese culture among the Bodos. Altogether the area has been selected solely so as to identify the presence of any impact or influence from other cultures and non-tribal societies of the neighbouring states and adjacent country upon the Bodo community. The study will focus on the influences from other communities upon the Bodos, especially in the women and land right system as well as the tribal customary laws of the Bodo community.

Map no. 1.1.1: Location map of the study area.



Source: Digitised map in Arc GIS.

## **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Globally the land-people relationship or property inheritance is discussed in terms of Men-Land relationship instead of Women-Land relationship. The concept of land and property ownership has been generalised and limited to men since time immemorial. However in the current time period, the role of women in various spheres of life is equally prized. The discussion on providing equal rights to women in relation to land ownership seems to be marginalised.

India is a country where dominantly patriarchal society is mostly practised. In such a societal structure the question of women been given the land rights rarely be raised. In the context of the tribal societies of North East India the scene is not different from the country as a whole. The problems related to gender equality in almost all the aspects lacks in priority of focus in the region. The tribal communities of North East India has a very different social and cultural setting in which their relationship with the land is central to their social, economic and spiritual. Mostly the tribal communities of North East India practises patriarchal social system, except the Khasi and the Garo communities of Meghalaya that practises matriarchy in the society. The system of land holding and property inheritance among the women in the communities are rarely focused. The problem here lies in the thought process that in the tribal communities women are likely given equal treatment in comparison to the non-tribal communities of India. Whereas, in terms of land and property distribution the scene is no different from the rest of the country.

The focus of the study here is to the target the women land and property ownership in the tribal communities of North East India. The work intents to focus on the issues related to women and land rights in special reference to the Bodo community of Assam. Bodo is the largest tribal community of Assam. The community has a patriarchal society where men have the major role in most of the context of the society. Among the Bodo community the issues related to women and her rights was never been a major concern. In the present day context too, the community does not show much interest in terms of women and land rights. The responsible reasons could be the silence of women, unawareness of the systems.

The study intends to focus in the issues related to Bodo women-land and property inheritance in the community in Assam. The problems of imbalance distribution of property will be highlighted. The factors responsible to unequal treatment based on gender will be discussed. The prose and prospects of the traditional land holding system of the Bodo community will be focused based on which unequal property distribution is happening. The problems related to the factors and impacts of women and land rights in terms of educational, economic, social and political aspects.

Bodo women has played dynamic roles and still playing to safeguard and uphold the dignity and integrity of the family, village and community as a whole. The women have set numerous examples of equal strength and determination to maintain the pride of the community. Despite all the efforts, Bodo women lacks in the role to play as a decision maker in the family, village and community. In the current times as well the major decisions are taken by the male member of the family. The Bodo women lack to upraise their voices for equal rights in choice of economic activities, political decisions as well as property and land holdings in the community. Thus, the study intends to intensively highlight the targeted issues related to Bodo women and land and property rights.

### **1.3 LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature taken into consideration for the strong base of the study includes census of India, District Handbooks, District Statistical Report, several published journals, e-journals, and some books have also being consulted as follows-

Thien (2009) has discussed about the methodologies used in the research work based on gender in the past and in the present in the forms of certain theories based on qualitative and quantitative methods. Johnson (2009) has discussed about the basic foundation of feminist geography and also has highlighted its historic evolution. Agnes (1999) has widely talked about the religion based laws and their unequal implications based on gender and Indian legal policies. Kumar (2011)

mainly concentrated in the distribution of information regarding the research methodology in a step by step process for the beginners. The different techniques and processes enclosed in the research work for the benefit of the researcher have been considered to main priority of the book. Joseph (2007) puts the light upon the treasure of content which mainly focuses in enlightening the fundamental knowledge of remote sensing tools and techniques. The book also highlights the sources, history, processes, data presentation, interpretation, analysis and application of remote sensing. Ramutsindela (2010) has focused in racial inequality in land ownership as well as also highly discusses about the disproportionate division of property and natural resources among the western elites and the indigenous people. The oppression led to the rise of revolt against the western white settlers comprising of liberation movements in Africa, South America and Asia. Such racial discrimination has been talked about. Fisher and Naidoo (2016) have elaborately worked on the Geography of gender inequality, sustainable development goals to help in reducing this major issue of concern worldwide. Represented and projected the level of gender inequality among 47 countries, with the help of charts and thematic maps based on male-headed and female-headed households. Gaidzanwa (1994) is a work of Zimbabwe women's land rights, largely portraying the social systems, customary laws in their society. The historical background of women's land rights in Zimbabwe deals with the importance of land in determining the economic condition of the women. Although the country is indifferent of the impact of colonialism, expressing women dependency on men. It also includes the land debates in the contemporary era that is setting better economic rights for peasant women in Zimbabwe. Ginzberg (2007) focused upon the rights of men and women through a story of a film. It is a work of fiction, combining stories of different character on equality, social justice, political and economic rights anticipating of movements against the government. The representation of women of different time frame and their activist notion for attaining their rights, by suggesting the ignorant role of men, continues to limit in identifying the role of feminism. Kusakabe, Yunxian and Kelkar (1995) have concentrated in the problems related with agrarian society in Cambodia and widely talks about the status of women in terms of land ownership, adoption and increased numbers of land disputes based on gender. It raised questions on the rules of the government

influenced by the Cambodia's Royal government, military camping and American bombing affecting the whole scene of the people leaving them landless. The work in the third phase discusses about the intertwining of land and gender issues, considering women as the manager and money keeper. The social customs for divorced women and other customs associated with family economy and societal status has also been focused. Pruitt (2008) talks about deploying the tools of critical geographers-space, place, and scale-to inform law and policymaking. Women's newfound status has widened the division of women being a reproductive labour in the private space of the household. It has portrait the role of women in public and private space in different time frame depicting the prominent gendered based work divisions, leading to laws and legal agitations of economic, political equality among women globally. Agarwal (1996) the work is a response to Indu Agnihotri's review on her book 'A field of One's own: Gender and land rights in South Asia'. The work is mainly focused around the women's class position and women of being aware of their rights. The household and social level obstacles in order to overcome and realise their right on land has been mentioned to be necessary. Feminist theories as well as the land ownership versus controlling factors that led to arguments for the land ownership of women as juridical rights.

Hanson and Geraldine (1995) focus on work experiences of women in various parts of city. The dependency of women over local availabilities has been highlighted where in regards to women safety and public faceoff has been put forth, which was prominent in English patriarchal society. In argue to that the feminist movement intervene came to life, locating freedom of access in lieu of social, economic, geographic boundaries, proving equal opportunity to labour wage and market. Morin (2009) discusses about the several organizations, society, groups of academic geographers whose research and work advances feminist and/or gender geography, or women's status in the discipline of geography. The formation of International groups such as IGU that commission on gender and geography. Pollard (2009) concentrates in the origin of interest in human geography and the social sciences discussing about work and the work space that used to be given to the women, based on which the wage was provided relatively less than men. Several contributions of work from different countries have been shown in a table of

occupation in different sectors of both men and women. The table interprets inequality in wage distribution, gendered globalisation and gendered local labour market. Price (2009) deals with the discourses of geography and introduction of women in historical geographies of gender. Highlighting about the historical geographies of gender relations and capitalism in which the work of Linda McDowell, adds to our knowledge by revealing the gendered organization of space which reinforces unequal gender social relations. Further, in addition of Doreen Massey, contributing in understanding the women relations to capitalism. Capitalism suggests, about gender based work space work roles derived from Victorian ideas of separate spheres of operation for men and women. Hence, historical geographers have re-examined the rise of the Western city, industrialization, and globalization. Razavi (2007) focuses on the tenure of land reforms in national and global policy agendas. While at a certain level of general ideas, principle of gender equality in access to resources, including land, has been looked upon by a diverse range of policy makers. There are numbers of tension and challenges present to obstruct women's effective access to land and its contribution to decent livelihood. It also includes the current problem of customary systems of land tenure and decentralisation of land management in the society.

Ray (2011) has talked about the tribes of India and their culture. The author highlights the basic information based on land alienation, forest and other socio-economic aspects. Velayudhan (2009) in her work talked about the rights of woman in different countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, India and the condition of woman in those countries. She also added the idea of man as the head of the household and also highlighted the different woman organizations and its role. Trivedi (1993) the key notes focuses in the tribal communities and their land reforms as well as their development. The prime focus of the book revolves around the tribal community of India and their practises and systems of land holding as well as land transfer or divisions and distributions. Apart from that the book also deals with the changes in the system and the developmental activities among the tribal groups. Daimary (2012) talked about the status of Indigenous people of the country in the

context of land and issues around the land ownership. Book covers the important work of historical narrative and its changing tribal land relationship which is being influenced by any of the alien forces and norms and has partially talked about the woman and land rights among the indigenous or adivasi of India as a matter of status issues. Kelkar (1991) discussed about the agricultural labour, women and land rights in Bihar (India). In his article, provides an informative knowledge about land reform program in India after independence and the reason for introducing such program in India, to break the traditional feudal hold on the socio-economic structure and to promote agricultural productivity. It also covers the several freedom activities out of such feudal hold and the voices for women right came up. Agarwal (1995) has focused in discussing about the women's right in agricultural land, as per the legal right is concerned, despite of their religious norms. It also highlights the gender discriminatory aspects of inequality and challenges that a women has to go through while claiming for their land rights. The laws of inheritance, the old legacies were not in favour of providing land ownerships especially the agricultural land to women. In the work it has mentioned about the land reforms and its influences in the present day in relation to land rights. Agarwal (1998) in her work has concentrated in two main arguments, one is to ensure effective economic security for widows in India in terms of property and most significantly, in arable land. The other argument is to change the perception of overlooking and judging widowed women in society. Rao and Rana (1997) have presented the tale of injustice suffered by the women of Santhal society as an outset of Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act in Bodhgaya district of Bihar. It has become the first land struggle to take up issue of women-land right in the country. They mentioned about understanding the importance of social character of land and property relations before one could understand the value of land rights. Subramaniam (2004) highlights the historic movements led by the Indian women, enlightening about the organisations headed and controlled solely by women since the last 50 years. It talks of AIWC (All Indian Women Conferences) to be the most influential along with Women's Indian Association and was succeeded by the National Federation of Indian Women. These organisations work for women and girl children that are the victim of social problems, providing knowledge and strength to tackle and fight against it. Jain (2023) has discussed about women's land ownership

in India based on the digital records. The author explains that large proportion of the households in the rural areas owns small or marginal land holdings. Those lands are basically used for agricultural purpose as it's the main economic resource, especially in low-or-middle-income agriculture-based economies. The paper talks about the existing restrictions on women in holding land and the biasness against the women in attaining land rights at different stages. The paper is based on the data analysis of 16000 original digital copies of land records for 12States/Union Territories in rural India. The paper has challenged and raised the question of unsolved inequalities between the genders and the upcoming threats in the society associated with single land titles, lower share, smaller size and inferior quality. Talking about the state-wise lack of proper laws and provisions of new laws were reviewed in the paper, along with the required implementation of the laws were highlighted.

Dutta and Karna (1987) talked about an overview of the land relations of North East India in relation to all the states of North East India and the predominant habitants of the states. Overall the book talks about the different states and the indigenous predominant tribe in relation to land and its ownership and its backwardness. Barbora (2009) has widely discussed about the land, people and politics of North-East India where it covers the information regarding the tribal land alienation in the North East region of India. The main focus of the work is on the land alienation and the tribal people which are being influenced by the politics and affected by the laws generated by the government and also the developmental projects. Chakraborty (2004) has widely discussed about land and its importance in her introductory work and in the later chapters the author discussed about the land relations and systems in Tripura including the problems of the tribal community and the implication of the land reform systems. Jamir (2015) mentioned about the women and land rights to be as one of the most crucial issues of any society that is trying to bring in equity and justice. Author also talks about the customary laws apart from economic dimension, ownership of land in social-cultural correlates particularly in the society of Naga's where is incorporated with identity. Longkumer (2015) the article has discussed about the land as the backbone of an individual and also community as a whole and discusses about the land and land based resources as

crucial to the social and cultural existence of the indigenous peoples as they constitute the base of their livelihood and form as a source of their social, cultural and spiritual development. Author focuses in the relationship between Nagas and land in prior. Nongbri (1988) in her work she talked about the Succession Act applies specifically to the Khasi and Jaintia tribes of Meghalaya and confers on any Khasi and Jaintia, not being a minor, the right to dispose off his self-acquired property by will (Government of Meghalaya). Khasi custom prescribes the devolution of ancestral property in the female line. Das (2012) talked widely about the tribal women and their status in their respective societies. Author highlighted the demographic share and socio-cultural practices and the importance of women in it and also the literacy rate, occupational structure as well as the pattern of social change and development was covered in her work. Dutta (1993) has widely highlighted about the memorandum and demand for separate statehood among the numerous tribal and non-tribal groups of people in Assam. Gangte (2016) has put forward the case study of Mizo tribe in North East India based on gender and customary law. Here the author has focused in presenting the status of Mizo women in the society. Despite of having high literacy rate, Mizos has patriarchal society where the power, prestige, privileges are still with men as and has the sole control over decision making. Mandal and Ete (2010) has worked in relation with the women and their status in North East India broadly. The prime focus of their work was to present the overview of women in Galo society of Arunachal Pradesh. As the work is of recent years, it has portrait the present concepts related with properties of the community, village, households, and individual as well as their rights. There are several policies and schemes are present, yet they are still not in complete favour of women welfare and equality. Roy and Kuri (2001) put upon the land reforms in Arunachal Pradesh, where their prime factor of study was the economic constrains that the people of Arunachal Pradesh has to go through after the land reform. The transformations that the state has dealt in terms of government policies in agriculture such as Jhum Land Regulation Act of 1947 has brought upon agricultural modernisation. Sitlhou (2015) studies the interplay between gender, religion and politics by positing the case of Kuki women and contributes towards understanding where patriarchy operates and is reinforced when it comes to women's relationship

to land. Religiously, patriarchal ancestral land holding system that already existed and indirectly supported the gender-based inheritance customs depriving women. Hazarika (2020) discusses about land as a significant marker of a gender just society. The paper has been prepared based on the narratives from the field. The respondent namely Jwngma Baideu, a Bodo women has narrated the sites and ground practices of women and land ownership in the study area.

Atreya (2007) has covered about the origin, history of settlement, culture, religion, sub-divisions of Bodo-Kachari and also has highlighted the social, political issues around the Bodo community as a hindrance for the development of the community, provides the basic informative knowledge to the reader. Brahma (2015) the work is collective information of the Bodo social, cultural, religious and related folklores. The detailed portray of the lives of Bodo people starting from the societal construction to the introduction of Sanskritization among the Bodo animist believers. The historic folklores of the Bodos are beautifully portrait and framed along with the religion associated with all the detailed rituals in various religious systems. Endle (1911) has discussed about the Bodos for the first time in the modern academic world discussing about the origin, history, social structure, religion, folk-lore, customs and laws including the tribes closely attached with Kacharis and the language has been talked in brief as a early start and still has been a great base to the new researcher and academic world. Brahma (1998) the author's prime focus was in the culture and the different cultural activities, marriage customs and laws of the Boro community. It also included about the religious beliefs, folk tales and different festive songs conveying about both happiness and sorrow. Hazarika (2020) the paper conveys the social systems and gendered norms of Bodo community among women. Their land rights through the political and economic freedom have been discussed. Tripathy (2020) the paper here discusses about the different dimensions of Bodo community of Dalbari village in Barama block of Baksa district in Assam. Firstly, it talks about the geographical location the historical, social, cultural and religious dimensions of Bodo as a tribal community of Assam. Islary (2020) in his work, he discussed in detail about the activities of Bodo women both in household as well as in public. The contribution of Bodo women in maintaining the economic stability of

the household has been presented in his work. In the paper the author talked about the work force participation of the women in non identified works to be more than the identified govt. or central govt. jobs. Brahma (2022) in his work discussed about the Women's land access in the tribal society. The ability and role played by women in the tribal societies have been highlighted in association to land. The disparity in the land access affecting the livelihood and children's education in the tribal areas of Bodoland Territorial Region (B.T.R.) was the prime focus of the paper. The study targeted the tribal communities of the BTR and the women access to land and the associated impacts of disparities in the land holding. The paper has discussed about the benefits of women being given the land holdings right for the better development of the society.

#### **1.4 SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

The work is an amalgamated study of the recent discourse of gender and geography. Gender geographies primarily deal with the issues oriented with disparity in the aspects of social, economic, political and spiritual context. The work basically intends to understand the issues around the women and land rights in the tribal communities of NE India.

Land is one of the most essential natural resources for the entire human race. Among the tribal communities, it is not just considered as resource yet, it has more often associated with their indignity, identity and existence. The study intends to highlight the Land-People relationship emphasising to the context of tribal women and their extent to land rights.

When Land-People relationship is discussed in the popular domain Women-Land relationship is found to be marginalising specially in the context of the tribals of North Eastern region of India. However, the issues of women and land right is

present in every community, only the share and the proportion of existence vary from each other. In NE India particularly the tribal communities has a very different social and cultural setting in which their relationship with the land is central to their social, economic and spiritual context. In the backdrop of this, the patriarchy system followed by the tribal community with the exception of the Khasis and Garos has let to very male dominated systems whereby women are by and large marginalised from ownership and inheritance of the most vital resource, i.e. Land.

Among the Bodos the issue of woman-land and property was never been the prime focus of discussion, the responsible reasons could be the silence of women, unawareness of the systems. The importance has not been yet given to such issues because so far all these issues are being handled in a family level. The other importance of this study is that it will collectively bring the issue of land rights and highlight the situation of the Bodo women and their socio-cultural construction in a global level.

A proper study may give a clear view of the depth of this issue. It will give a clear understanding of the ideology and way of thinking among the Bodo women helping them to rise as well as develop. A proper study will give a prior indication and solution to the future expansion of gendered inequality in the community. Equal share of development with importance and rights to both the genders will also increase. Bodos lacks in awareness of their legal rights, including the political unrest situation.

The proposed research is being intended to both acquire clear, in depth knowledge and provide information regarding the traditional laws of the community and the changes that it goes through over the years and also gives the status of Bodo women and land relationships in respect to the social, economic, political identity on which no such work has been done, therefore there is a wide scope for the proposed study.

## **1.5 OBJECTIVES**

- i) To study about the status of women & land rights among the tribal communities of North East India
- ii) To have an in-depth study on the relationship between women and land rights within Bodo community
- iii) To analyse the social, economic and political impact of Bodo women vis-a-vis to land rights

## **1.6 DATABASE AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The following database and research methodology has been used for the study-

### **(A) COLLECTION OF INFORMATION**

Collection of information is the first step to prepare a research report. Data is collected from two sources-

#### **1) SECONDARY SOURCES OF DATA**

Secondary data sources are those data which were previously collected by the authorised governmental and non-governmental agencies for a specific purpose and for various causes. It includes, collection of literature, documents, official records, government data, books, journal (both print and electronics).

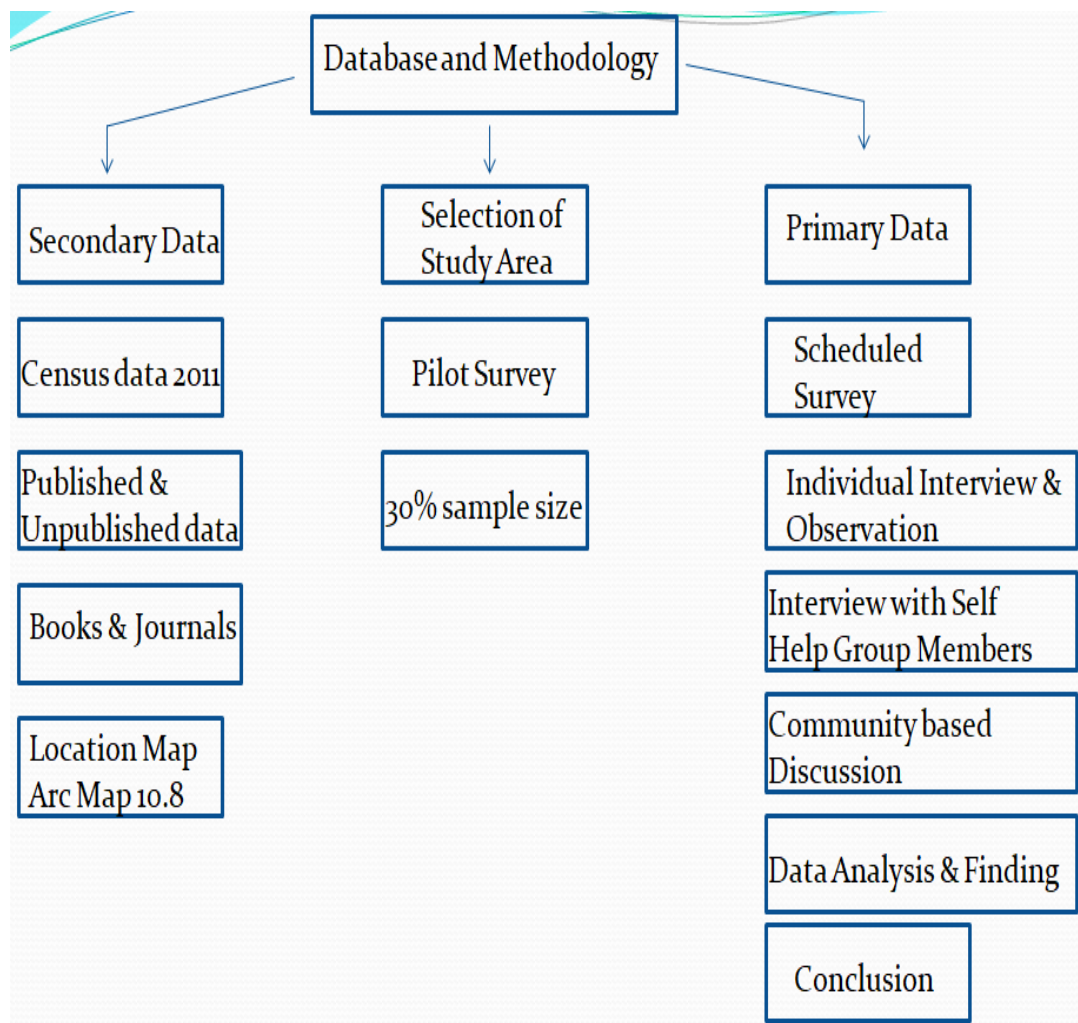
- a) Statistical Data- Statistical Data are those data which are acquired from the authorised records such as census of India, UNDP Report, District Handbooks, District Statistical Report, etc. which will supportively strengthen the quantitative part of information collected from the primary data source i.e. from the field survey.

b) Non-Statistical Data- Non-Statistical Data are those supportive data or information which is collected from several articles, periodical reports, book sections, etc.

## 2) PRIMARY SOURCE OF DATA

Information gathered from the field survey, by using appropriate sample data survey based on required questionnaires interviews, group discussions and field visitations and observation in the selected study area.

Figure no.: 1.6.1 Database and Methodology.



## **(B) QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN**

The questionnaire design is basically open-ended questions for household survey. The survey is more like an interview than a typical survey. Group discussions with the women of the permitted villages and self-help groups, NGOs lead by women is also included in the questionnaire design for the concrete collection of information.

### **1.7 SAMPLE DESIGN**

i) Non-Probability Sampling Method- It is the method which involves non-random selection of sample based on convenience and purpose of specific allowance of easy data collection. From Non probability sampling method, the following has been opted-

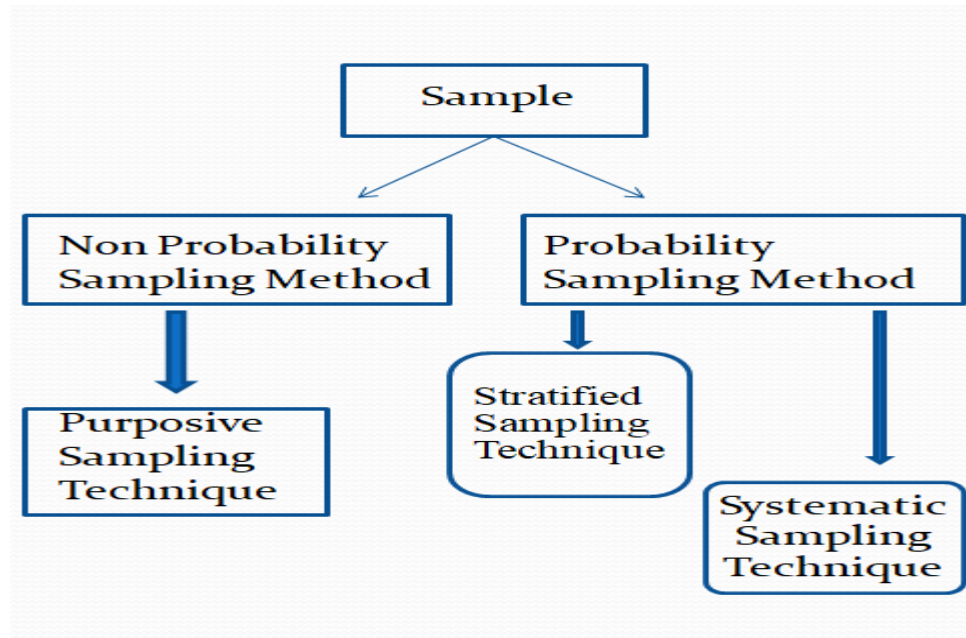
(a) Purposive Sampling Technique has been opted for the selection of sample which concentrates only the dominant Bodo populated areas/villages.

ii) Probability Sampling Method- It is the method which involves random selection of sample providing opportunity to make strong statistical data. From the probability sampling method the following two has been opted-

(a) Stratified Sampling Technique has been chosen to sort the total Bodo population of each district into two strata based on gender ensuring the sample size reflects the total population. This technique has also been used to break down the sample from Districts into Community Development Blocks (C.D. Blocks) and from C.D. Blocks to Bodo dominated areas/villages.

(b) Systematic sampling technique has been opted to systematically choose the regular intervals of sample from each area/village.

Figure no.: 1.7.1: Sample selection model based on the study area.



## 1.8 SAMPLE SIZE

To collect 30% of the total Bodo populated area/villages and towns of the study area, the sample has been collected by disintegrating the four districts into CD Blocks and again disintegrating it into towns and villages.

(i) According to 2011 census, 31 CD Blocks has been demarcated, under which there are 12 towns and 3066 villages. From the census report around 60% of the villages are concentrated with Bodo population i.e. 1838 villages.

(ii) As per the sample size norms of 30% of total Bodo populated village, data from 551 villages have been collected through online mode i.e. (Google form), telephone interview and rigorous field survey.

(iii) Around 200 sample villages got covered through Google forms, around 30 sample villages through telephone interview. Around 321 sample villages have been covered through field visit. Minimum of 2 respondents (male and female), of which one is Village Head and another is a random Bodo women were covered from each

village from the study area. Total of 1102 respondents from rural areas and 120 respondents from 12 identified towns has been collected. Therefore, total of 1222 respondents has been collected from the field study.

Table No. 1.8.1: Study area Bodo dominated population and 30% sample size.

STUDY AREA	TOTAL	60% BODO DOMINATED	30% SAMPLE SIZE
DISTRICTS	4	4	4
C.D. BLOCK	31	21	21
SAMPLE VILLAGE	3066	1839	551
SAMPLE TOWN	12	12	12
NO. OF VILLAGE RESPONDENT	-	-	1102
NO. OF URBAN RESPONDENT	-	-	120
TOTAL FEMALE	-	-	599
TOTAL MALE	-	-	623
GRAND TOTAL RESPONDENTS	-	-	1222

Source: District Handbook profile of B.T.A.D., 2011  
Community Development Block Record, 2011

Table no. 1.8.2: District wise sorted number of Villages and Towns of the study area.

DISTRICTS	VILLAGES	TOWNS
KOKRAJHAR	192	4
CHIRANG	91	3
BAKSA	124	2
UDALGURI	144	3
TOTAL	551	12

Source: District Handbook profile of B.T.A.D., 2011  
Community Development Block Record, 2011

Table no. 1.8.3: District wise total number of towns and no. of respondents of the study area.

DISTRICTS	TOWNS	No. of Respondent
KOKRAJHAR	4	40
CHIRANG	3	30
BAKSA	2	20
UDALGURI	3	30
TOTAL	12	120

Source: District Handbook profile of B.T.A.D., 2011  
Community Development Block Record, 2011

Table no. 1.8.4: District wise Distribution of Data Collection from Google Form and Field Survey from the villages of the study area.

Districts	Total Respondents	Google Form (2019-2021)	Field Survey (2021-2023)	Interview through Phone
Kokrajhar	384	114	204	24
Chirang	182	80	116	16
Baksa	248	96	152	8
Udalguri	288	110	170	12
Total	1102	400	642	60

Source: Field Survey of the study area.

Table no. 1.8.5: Block Wise Distribution of Surveyed Villages and number of respondent from rural areas.

DISTRICT	C.D. BLOCK	NO. OF SAMPLE VILLAGES	NO. OF RESPONDENTS
KOKRAJHAR	Kochugaon	48	96
	Gossaigaon	25	50
	Dotma	35	70
	Kokrajhar	46	92
	Rupsi	12	24
	Mahamaya (part)	26	52
CHIRANG	Sidli-Chirang (part)	21	42
	Boro-Bazar (Census T.)	38	76
	Bijni-Manikpur (part)	32	64
BAKSA	Goreswar	21	42
	Barama	14	28
	Tamulpur	37	74
	Baksa	20	40
	Dhamdhama	14	28
	Nagrijuli	18	36
UDALGURI	Udalguri	45	90
	Mazbat	30	60
	Kalaigaon	17	34
	Rowta	15	30
	Bhergaon	28	56
	Borchala	9	19
TOTAL	-	551	1102

Source: District Handbook profile of B.T.A.D., 2011

Community Development Block Record, 2011

Table No. 1.8.6: Survey data collection from rural part of the study area.

<b>DISTRICTS</b>	c.d. Blocks	total villages	60% Bodo villages	Sample villages	% of Sample size	No. of respondent
KOKRAJHAR	6	1065	640	192	30%	384
CHIRANG	2	509	304	91	30%	182
BAKSA	6	691	414	124	30%	248
UDALGURI	6	801	480	144	30%	288
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>3066</b>	<b>1839</b>	<b>551</b>		<b>1102</b>

Source: Field Survey of the study area.

Table No.1.8.7: Survey data collection from urban part of the study area.

<b>DISTRICT</b>	No. of towns	Total household	% of household	60% Bodo household	Sample household	% sample household	No. of respondent
KOKRAJHAR	4	11722	38%	7033	47	0.40%	47
CHIRANG	3	7572	25%	4543	31	0.40%	31
BAKSA	2	2452	9%	1471	9	0.40%	9
UDALGURI	3	8313	28%	4988	33	0.40%	33
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>30059</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>18035</b>	<b>120</b>		<b>120</b>

Source: Field Survey of the study area.

### **(C) PROCESSING OF DATA**

Data that are collected can be processed in two ways-

Statistical technique i.e. sampling method is the most common technique to represent the total population by taking a percentage of population as a sample. It is mainly quantitative in nature. And another is the non-statistical technique i.e. qualitative information gathered from either field survey or any government reports for supporting the quantitative findings.

1) **CARTOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATION** is those which represent spatial and non-spatial data using suitable cartographic maps such as thematic maps and GIS

(Geographical Information System) by processing the raw imageries in ArcGIS software.

2) GRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION is those which graphically represent the data through suitable graphs, tables, diagrams and charts.

#### **(D) PREPARATION OF FINAL REPORT**

The final preparation of the thesis includes a logical sequence of statements made based on primary observation through survey using questionnaires, secondary data collected from various sources, processing of raw data, analysis and interpretation of the data.

#### **FORMATION OF CHAPTERS**

Chapter 1. Introduction

Chapter 2. Women-land relationship among the tribal communities of Northeast India

Chapter 3. Women-land relationship among the Bodo community

Chapter 4. Social, Economic and Political impacts of Women-land rights

Chapter 5. Summary and Conclusion

#### **1.9 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS**

**Chapter: 1 Introduction.** This chapter includes the concept of research done in the following topic. Conceptual framework, introductory information of Gender Geography and its discourses has been included. The chapter is comprised of the structural framework of the research which includes the Literature Review, Scope of

the study, Objectives, Database and Methodology, Sample Design and Sample size, Data Processing and Analysis Techniques and lastly the Structure of the Chapters.

**Chapter:2 Women-land relationship among the tribal communities of Northeast**

**India:** It includes the general overview of the different tribal communities of North East India in brief and about their women and land relationships. Property handling and ownership of land in the different tribes of Northeastern states are the major focus of this chapter.

**Chapter:3 Women-land relationship among the Bodo community:**

The chapter intends to cover the overall history, social, culture, economy, politics and religious setup of Bodo community. It also discusses about the land ownership system practised in the community in nutshell. The chapter highlights the women and land relationship in the community based on the data collected from the field.

**Chapter:4 Social, Economic and Political impacts of Women-land rights:**

Here the chapter discusses about the women and land relationship in terms of three grounds i.e. **Social ground-** within social grounds other factors like culture, education, religious and tradition has been focused. **Economic ground-** within Economic ground different economic practises either individually or in group has been discussed. **Political/legal ground-** within political ground, rights and liberty of women in terms of land owning, decision making and impacts of political unrest in the study area has been discussed. The chapter also emphasis to cover possible hindrances faced by women during the processes of land owning and land transfer based on the data analysis from the study area.

**Chapter:5 Summary and Conclusions:**

This is the final chapter of the study which includes the summary and outcome from all the above analysis. The chapter also highlights the suggestions and future strategies for the improvement and development of the Bodo women in the community.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **WOMEN-LAND RELATIONSHIP AMONG THE TRIBAL COMMUNITIES OF NORTH EAST INDIA**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

India as a country has a significant part in its North Eastern most region sharing its International boundary with the countries like Nepal, Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Bangladesh. Northeast India is consisting of the eight states namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura. The region offers diversity and vividness in topography, climate and other natural resources. It is a home to numerous tribal communities with diverse cultural, social, and economic practices. One of the key aspects of tribal societies in the region is the relationship between gender and land ownership. Land is central to the social and economic fabric of tribal life, and access to land plays a crucial role in determining economic autonomy, power, and status. However, women in tribal societies often face constraints regarding land ownership, despite their significant roles in agriculture and land management.

##### **2.1.1. Geographical Background of Northeast India**

Northeast of the country commands special importance in India, not only because of their location but also their cultural and historical uniqueness. The landscape, the range of communities and geographical and ecological diversity make these states quite different from other parts of the country. They are known as eight siblings and referred to as 'eight sisters' or 'seven sisters and one brother'. These states cover an area of 2,63,179 sq. km, approximately eight per cent of the country's total geographical area and house around 3.76 per cent of the total population the country. Around 98 per cent of the boundary of these states has international borders. Surrounded by hills and beautiful rivers, these states fall in the category of eastern Himalayan ranges and Patkai-Naga hills along with Brahmaputra-Barak river systems and valley plains. The hills and basins are a mixture of mountain ranges,

plateaus, low hills and valleys. Rich in natural resources and flora and fauna, the region is a gateway to East and South-East Asia. (NCERT, 2017).

Arunachal Pradesh is the largest among the North-Eastern states in India. Ethnic and linguistic heterogeneity is a noticeable feature of the state. Tawang, having one of the largest and the oldest Buddhist monasteries in India, is located here. With an area of 83,743 sq. km, Arunachal Pradesh is the largest among the north-eastern states of India. Arunachal is sparsely populated, the total population being 13.83 lakh as per the Census 2011. Arunachal is comparatively a new state. Before it got its statehood on 20 February 1987, it was a Union Territory (UT) for 15 years since 1972. (NCERT, 2017). Most of Arunachal is covered by the Himalayan range. However, the Patkai Hills also cover parts of Lohit, Changlang and Tirap regions, bordering Myanmar in the east. The climate varies with elevation. Areas at high altitude in the upper Himalayas have a cold climate. The climate in the middle Himalayan range is temperate, while the Sub Himalayan region is sub-tropical with relatively hot summer and mild winters. Normally, the soil is not muddy because of hilly slopes. The state has a narrow belt of foothill plains along the border with Assam. There are also some beautiful valleys such as Apatani in the Lower Subansiri district. Arunachal is covered by a dense evergreen forest. Forest products such as bamboo, cane, timber and medicinal plants are abundant in the state. Arunachal is a home to species of nearly 5,000 plants, more than 600 birds and close to 100 terrestrial mammals. The Hornbill is a unique bird found mostly in the forests here. The Mithun (*bos frontalis*), a semi-domesticated animal, is unique to the state. It plays an important role in the socio-cultural life of the people. (NCERT, 2017).

Assam, a land of scenic beauty, with rivers like Brahmaputra and Barak, is the second largest but most populous and developed state in the Northeast. Located in North East India, between the latitude of 24° and 28°N and longitude of 90° and 96°E and at the south of the eastern Himalayas, Assam or Axom has an area of 78,440 sq. km. Squeezed amidst the young mountains in upper and south Assam and old mountains in lower Assam are the valleys of Brahmaputra and Barak rivers. Geographically, Assam is connected to the rest of India via a 22-km land strip in West Bengal, popularly known as 'Chicken's Neck', near Siliguri. Assam shares an

international border with Bhutan and Bangladesh. Assam houses two of the UNESCO World Heritage sites—the Kaziranga National Park and the Manas Wildlife Sanctuary. The state produces some of the finest tea in the world. Assam is dominated by alluvial plains of the Brahmaputra and Barak, apart from its tributaries. The Mikir Hills plateau (Karbi Anglong), the North Cachar Hills and marginal plateau and hills from the adjoining states make up the highland. The Brahmaputra is a trans-boundary river, originating in the Chema Yungdung glacier near Mount Kailash in the northern Himalayas at an altitude of around 5,250 metres above the Mean Sea Level (MSL). The river enters India in Arunachal Pradesh as Siang, descending rapidly onto the plains where it is called Dihang. It flows for about 35 km to meet the rivers Dibang and Lohit. From this point of confluence, the river becomes wider, extending upto 10 km in breadth, and is called the Brahmaputra. After flowing 918 km in India, the river enters Bangladesh as Meghna, before completing its journey into the Bay of Bengal. The total length of the Brahmaputra is around 2,900 km. The Brahmaputra has over 120 tributaries and distributaries and that makes the Assam's Brahmaputra valley fertile. The Barak originates at the Barail range south of Kohima at an altitude of 2,995 metres above the MSL and flows through South Assam. The river bifurcates into Surma and Kushiara near the Assam-Bangladesh border. These rivers flow through Bangladesh and join an old channel of the Brahmaputra to form the Meghna. Assam is also known for Kamakhya temple, one of the most revered Shakti-Peeth in India, and Srimanta Sankardeva who was one of the most versatile saints in the Indian history.

Manipur is a beautiful state located on the eastern boundary of the North East, bordering Myanmar, and having a chequered history of culturally advanced kingdoms. Manipur is a beautiful state surrounded by hill ranges and was rightly called the 'Jewel of India' by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Known as 'Kangleipak' or 'Sanaleipak' (golden land) to its inhabitants, it has an area of 22,327 sq. km, and is bounded by Nagaland in the north, Assam in the west, Mizoram in the south-west and Myanmar in the east and south-east. The valley is a plateau; its height above the sea level is about 2,600 ft. The hills and mountains of Manipur are offshoots from the Himalayas, which form the northern boundary of India. The state has a population of

27.22 lakh (Census 2011). Reportedly, the game of ‘Sagol Kangjei’ (Polo) originated in Manipur. Forests, consisting of short and tall trees, cover about 77 per cent of the total geographical area of the state. The state has four river basins: Barak river basin (Barak valley) in the west, Manipur river basin in central Manipur, Yu river basin in the east and a portion of Lanye river basin in the north. The Barak River, the largest in the state, originates in the Manipur hills and is joined by tributaries such as Irang, Maku and Tuivai. The Manipur river basin has eight major rivers: Manipur, Imphal, Iril, Nambul, Sekmai, Chakpi, Thoubal and Khuga. All these rivers originate from the surrounding hills. The state has sub-tropical monsoon climate. The period from June to September accounts for a little over half of the annual rainfall. The rainy season starts in April and continues till September-October. Sometimes, there is a considerable amount of pre-monsoon rain. The annual rainfall ranges between 1,100 mm and 3,500 mm. The forests in Manipur have the distinction of having a wide range of types, comparatively in a small geographical area. Teak, pine, oak, uningthou, leihao, bamboo and cane are important plants and trees grown in hill areas. In addition, rubber, tea, coffee, orange and cardamom are grown in hilly areas. These forests and the numerous swamps and valleys in the state are home to wide ranges of flora and fauna. The Keibul Lamjao National Park, situated in the south-eastern fringes of the Loktak Lake, is the only home of marsh-dwelling brown-antlered deer, ‘Sangai’ (*Cervus eldi eldi*) of Manipur. A variety of migratory birds from places as far as Siberia visit the Loktak Lake and other lakes in the valley every year. The state is also a home to approximately 500 varieties of orchids. (NCERT, 2017). ‘Ras-Lila’, a dance form of the state, is recognised as one of the classical dance forms of India. In recent times, the state has been known for the contribution and role of its women in social reforms and sports. The INA Memorial, Loktak Lake and Ima Keithel are some of the major places of interest in the state.

Meghalaya is a Sanskrit word, which means the ‘abode of clouds. The state with its capital Shillong, is a plateau located at an elevated range of 4,908 ft. (1,496 metres) above the sea level is famed for its beauty. During the Colonial period, Shillong was described as ‘Scotland of the East’ and selected as the provincial capital of Assam for its scenic beauty and pleasant climate. Mawsynram, in the southern

slope of Khasi hills of the state receives the highest rainfall in world. The state of Meghalaya, formed on 21 January 1972, was carved out of the state of Assam. Meghalaya comprises the United Khasi Hills, Jaiñtia Hills and Garo Hills. The total geographical area of the state is 22,429 sq. km with a population of 29.67 lakh (Census 2011). It is home to three major tribes—Khasis, Pnars (Jaiñtias) and Achik (Garos). ‘Khasi’ is a generic term that includes Khyntiam, Pnar, Bhoi, War, Lyngngam and Diko people. ‘Achik’ is used for Garo people. The state has a matrilineal system, which is unique in many ways. Meghalaya has some of the best schools and colleges in the region and the literacy rate is very high. Meghalaya is largely an agrarian state. However, the agro-climate conditions offer much scope for horticulture, handicrafts and use of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP). Meghalaya is particularly known for cottage and handicraft industries, with exquisite bamboo and cane products, weaving, woodcarving and pottery. Meghalaya is a plateau at different levels of elevation, ranging from 150 metres (490 ft.) to 1,961 metres (6,434 ft.). The highest point is known as the Shillong Peak. The monsoon bred climate has a wide variation depending on the altitude and physiographic difference of landmass. While the Shillong plateau has a temperate climate which rarely goes beyond 28 degrees, the winters are cold with very low temperatures which sometimes go below zero degree. On the other hand, lower regions such as the War Areas adjoining the Surma and the Brahmaputra valley have a tropical type of climate, experiencing high temperature for most of the year. (NCERT, 2017). About 70 per cent of the total geographical area in the state is covered with forests, which contain various types of trees. Sal and pine trees are the most valuable. There are 660 species of birds. Of these, many are threatened species. The great Indian hornbill is the largest bird in this state. There are also over 250 species of butterflies, nearly a quarter of the butterfly species found in India. A large variety of orchids—nearly 350—and an equally large variety of fruits, vegetables, spices, medicinal plants, including exotic plants such as the carnivorous pitcher plant (*Nepenthes Khasiana*) are endemic to the state. (NCERT, 2017). In Meghalaya, about 90 per cent of the forest land belongs to the community, individuals or clans and are regulated by the Autonomous District Councils. Of special significance are the small patches of forests known as ‘Ki Lawkyntang’ (sacred groves). These are ancient forests that have been preserved by

local communities due to religious and cultural beliefs and protected from any form of exploitation. Plucking even a leaf from these forests is considered a taboo. The sacred groves harbour many rare plants and animal species. The sacred grove of Mawphlang village (25 km from Shillong) is well-known and has attracted tourists and researchers.

Mizoram is one of the hilly states of India, with Aizawl as its capital. It is situated in the extreme south of Northeast India. It shares international boundary with Myanmar in the south and east, and Bangladesh in the west, thus, occupying an area of great strategic importance. It is bounded in the west by Tripura, and in the north by the states of Assam and Manipur. The state has an area of approximately 21,087 sq. km. According to the Census 2011, Mizoram has a population of 10.91 lakh. It has the highest concentration of tribal people among all states in India. (NCERT, 2017). Mizoram is a hilly state in the Northeast and is characterised by the presence of homogenous tribal population. With Lushai as their common language, almost all Mizos follow Christianity. Christianity is the major religion in Mizoram, which was introduced by Christian missionaries after the occupation of Lushai hills (Mizo territory) by the British during early nineteenth century. The church plays a vital role in the life of the people, who relate to it and its manifold activities. The state is credited with having emerged as a peaceful and stable polity and has shown a high degree of social and economic development in recent years. The economic life of the people of Mizoram has always been centred on jhum or shifting cultivation, which involves cutting a large tract of forest and burning it for cultivation. The crops grown in the jhum are paddy, cucumber, beans, ginger, mustard, cotton, etc. Apart from the main jhum fields, small fields generally near the house or at the bottom of jhum areas where vegetables, maize, etc., are grown are also managed by most households. This is called Leipui. Mizoram is suitable for horticulture. The principal crops grown are orange, banana, pineapple and cash crops like coffee, rubber and tea. In the field of floriculture, the state is a significant producer and global exporter of Anthurium and roses. It is one of the leading producers of bamboo in India. Mizoram is a land of natural beauty, with its scenic landscapes of bluish hills and mountains, steep rocky cliffs, beautiful lakes, deep valleys of rivers and amazing waterfalls. Despite being

hilly in nature, Mizoram also has some plain areas. The most prominent is the Champhai on the border of Mizoram and Myanmar. Others are Thensawl, North Vanlaiphai and Chemphai. Many of the rivers and streams run between the hill ranges and in plain areas. Rivers like Tlawng also known as Dhaleshwari, Tuirial and Tuivawl drain the northern portion of the land and fall into the Barak. These rivers were extensively used for transportation of people and material before the road to Mizoram was constructed and is still used for transporting bamboo and timber from interior areas to the plains of Cachar in Assam. Several mountain peaks are located in Mizoram. Phawngpui also known as Blue Mountain at 2,157 metres is the highest peak. Many lakes such as Palak Lake, Tamdil, Rungdil and Rengdil are also located here. The state has a pleasant climate throughout the year, with the temperature ranging from 11 to 21 degrees Celsius in winter and 20 to 30 degrees Celsius in summer. However, due to the influence of monsoons, heavy rain from May to September often makes the state vulnerable to landslides and other weather-related emergencies. (NCERT, 2017). It gets an average rainfall of about 3,000 mm. Winter (November to February), on the other hand, witnesses little or no rain. Strong storms during March-April are also common. Mizoram has 91.27 per cent of its area covered by forests. Out of this, 57 per cent of the geographical area is covered by different species of bamboo. About 27 bamboo species have been identified. A wide variety of flora and fauna is found in Mizoram.

Nagaland is known as the 'Land of Festivals', because the state abounds with festivities all through the year. It is predominantly a tribal state with a population of 19.78 lakh (Census 2011). The state lies between 25°6' and 27°4' north latitude and 93°2' and 95°15' east longitude. (NCERT, 2017). It is bounded by Myanmar and Arunachal Pradesh in the east, the state of Assam in the west and north, and Manipur in the south. It covers a geographical area of 16,579 sq. km with remarkable topographical variations. Nagaland, a predominantly tribal state on the eastern border, is mostly hilly and enjoys the reputation of being a home to Nagas, a brave group of people in the region. Its capital Kohima was an important battlefield during the World War II, when the Japanese invaded British India. The Kohima War Cemetery, made in the memory of soldiers killed in the Battle of Kohima in 1944, is

a major tourist attraction. Nagaland is an agrarian state with over half of its population dependent on agriculture and allied sectors. Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy and the largest employer in the state. Rice is the main staple food of the Nagas. It is cultivated in two major farming systems practised in the state viz., jhum cultivation and terrace rice cultivation/wet rice cultivation. Other principal crops include maize, pulses, oilseeds, sugarcane, potatoes, ginger, etc. Horticulture is another main activity in the state. The fruits and spices grown here are—orange, other citrus fruits and vegetables, passion fruit, pineapple, banana, Naga chilli, cardamom, ginger, turmeric, black pepper, betel vine, cashew nut, guava, plum, apple, flowers, etc. Agriculture and other primary sectors like forestry and logging, fishing, mining and quarrying contribute a significant share in the state's economy. Industrial development is comparatively slow due to remoteness of the state, lack of road connectivity and inadequate infrastructure facilities. Special land laws also restrict the transfer of land to non-locals. An Industrial Growth Centre (IGC) and a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) have been set up in Dimapur. (NCERT, 2017). The state enjoys a typical monsoon climate with variation from tropical to temperate conditions. The average winter temperature drops to 3 degrees Celsius in the hills and 6 degrees Celsius on the plains, while the average temperature in summer is 25 degrees Celsius in the hills and 34 degrees Celsius on the plains. The mountain system of the state can be divided into four ranges. The Low Mountain Range runs along the Assam Nagaland border. The range starts from Jalukie in Peren district and runs in a northerly direction through the length of Nagaland. It comprises some of the richest agricultural valleys in the state viz., Jalukie, Medziphe, Baghty, Changki-Tsurang and Tiru. Dimapur city and Champang oilfield are important places located in this range. The Middle Mountain Range, the most dominant mountain range, runs through the middle of the state from north to south. This system consists of many ranges and some small lateral offshoots running in east to west direction. Mao, Pfutsero, Chozuba, Satakha, Zunheboto, Suruhuto, Longkhim and Tuensang are the most prominent ranges as they divide the watersheds of the Brahmaputra in India from the watershed of the Chindwin in Myanmar. The Patkai Mountain Range is the longest mountain range in the state and forms the international boundary with Myanmar. Mount Saramati, which is approximately 12,000 ft. (3,840 metres), is the

highest peak in Nagaland situated in this range. It is in this region where the Naga Hill merges with the Patkai range in Myanmar. (NCERT, 2017). The Barail Mountain Range runs in the east to west direction and becomes progressively lower from east to west. This mountain range system extends from Nagaland to Manipur and from Manipur to Meghalaya. The Japfu range, which is 3,014 metres high, is the eastern-most point of this mountain range. The state is dissected by a number of seasonal and perennial rivers and rivulets. The major rivers of the state are: Doyang, Dikhu, Dhansiri, Tizu, Tsurong, Nanung, Tsurang/ Disai, Tsumok, Menung, Dzulu, Langlong, Zunki, Likimro, Lanye, Dzuza, Milak and Manglu. Dhansiri, Doyang and Dikhu flow westward into the Brahmaputra. The Tizu flows towards the east and joins the Chindwin river in Myanmar. Forest covers about 78.20 per cent of the total geographical area of the state. The geo-climatic conditions favour rich biodiversity in the state. The world's tallest 'Rhododendron' tree is found in Japfu mountain of Kohima district. The state is also rich in medicinal plants, bamboo species, canes and a variety of orchids. There are various species of mammalian avian fauna, a large number of fish and reptile species. For the management and preservation of wildlife, the state government has created parks and sanctuaries namely, Intangki National Park, Zoological Park Kohima, Rangapahar Wildlife Sanctuary, Fakim Wildlife Sanctuary and Puliebadze Wildlife Sanctuary. (NCERT, 2017).

Sikkim, a small bowl-like state, with as its capital Gangtok, has a hilly terrain and is accessible from the plains of Bengal. Sikkim is bounded to the north by China (Tibet), the kingdom of Bhutan to the east, Darjeeling district in West Bengal to the south, and Nepal to the west. It is distinguished by its Himalayan flora and fauna and Buddhist monasteries. Sikkim was known originally as 'Nye-mae-el' or 'heaven'. People from the neighbouring Tibet called it 'Ren-Jong' or 'Den Zong' or the 'Valley of Rice'. In this remote land, the Lepchas of Denzong and the Limbus of Eastern Nepal intermixed freely with each other. Marriages between the two communities were common. When a Limbu girl married a Lepcha and arrived at her husband's house, she would call it 'Su-Him', i.e., her new house. This word then became 'Sukhim' and later 'Sikkim'. The total area of Sikkim is 7,096 sq. km. Sikkim lies between 27° and 28° North latitude and between 88° and 89° East

longitude. (NCERT, 2017). The three principal ethnic communities of Sikkim—Lepchas (Rongs), Bhutias (Khampas) and Nepalese are nature-worshippers, while also practising Buddhism and Hinduism. The Kanchenjunga peak is regarded as a guardian deity by the Lepchas, and worship of the mountain is a major annual event in Sikkim followed by all communities. The principal occupation of rural people is agriculture. The major crops are—maize, paddy, wheat and millets. Cardamom and ginger are the main cash crops of the state. Animal husbandry is another activity that predominantly shapes the rural economy. Sikkim has a small portion of land under agriculture and a little of it under rice. Rice is the staple food of the people. As there is not much scope for increasing the land under agriculture, the stress has been on horticultural products like tea, cardamom, orchids, ginger, oranges, strawberries, vegetables, etc. Sikkim has around 450 species of orchids, many with rare medicinal values. The government maintains an orchidarium to protect the species. Coffee, mangoes, hybrid mandarin oranges, guavas and olives are also grown here. (NCERT, 2017). Sikkim's economy is largely agrarian. Because of the hilly terrain and lack of reliable transportation and infrastructure, there are no large-scale industries. The Government Food Preservation Factory (GFPF) is an important factory that produces products like fruit juices, orange squash, passion fruit squash, tomato ketchup, tomato puree, orange marmalade, mixed fruit jam, synthetic vinegar, mango pickle, etc., under the brand name of 'Sikkim Supreme'. The state produces Temi tea, a unique variety of tea, and is a major tourist attraction for visitors because of its Himalayan location. Despite its small size, Sikkim is geographically diverse, owing to its location in the foothills of the Himalayas. Terrain conditions range from tropical in the south to tundra in the north. Kanchenjunga, the world's third highest peak, is located here and straddles its northern border with Nepal. The state has prominent mountain peaks, glaciers, high-altitude lakes, including Tsomgo, Gurudongmar and Khecheopalri, hot springs, and many rivers and streams. Some of the mountain passes connect Sikkim with Tibet, Bhutan and Nepal. Sikkim is a popular destination for tourists, owing to its scenic beauty and political stability. The climate ranges from sub-tropical conditions in the south to tundra in the northernmost parts. Most inhabited regions in Sikkim, however, have a temperate climate with the temperature seldom exceeding 28 degrees Celsius (82° F) in summer and

dropping below zero degree Celsius (32° F) in winter. Sikkim has five seasons, namely winter, spring, summer, monsoon and autumn. The average annual temperature in most of Sikkim is around 18 degrees Celsius (64° F). Sikkim is also among a few states in India to receive regular winter snowfall.

The state of Tripura is a true representation of this bewildering diversity. Tripura, predominantly a hilly region, is surrounded by deltaic basin of Bangladesh, except for a small part in the north-east, which adjoins Cachar district of Assam and Mizoram. The state displays three distinct physiographic regions—hill ranges, undulating plateau land and low-lying alluvial land. There are five major hill ranges—Jampui, Unakoti-Sakhantlang, Longthorai, Atharamura-Kalajhari and Baramura-Deotamura. The highest peak lies at Bethliangchhip (Thaidawar, Shib-rangkhung), 975.36 metres above the sea level. Topographically, the state is characterised by hill slopes, tillas (hillocks), lungas (land areas between the tillas), flat lands, rivers and lakes. Tripura, bordering Bangladesh, has significant cultural linkages with Bengal and tribal regions of Assam and Mizoram. Tripura gained full statehood on 21 January 1972 as per the North-East Reorganisation Act, 1971. For socio-economic development, preservation of language and culture of Tripura Tribal Areas, an Autonomous District Council (ADC), was constituted in 1982 and later in 1985, it was brought under the 6th Schedule. The Tripuris are the largest tribal community in the state and constitute the core of its society. A predominantly hilly region, the state has a warm and humid tropical climate and is an agriculture-based economy. Agriculture constitutes the primary sector of the economy. More than half of the population is dependent on agriculture and allied activities for sustenance. Rice is the major crop and accounts for more than 90 per cent of the land under cultivation. Potato, sugarcane, pulses and jute are other major crops that are cultivated here. Jackfruit and pineapple are the important horticulture crops, apart from orange, banana, litchi, etc. The state has several food processing centres that produce many fruit products. Pisciculture has also shown some progress. The state produces a surplus of 104.3 million fish seeds. Rubber and tea are important cash crops. The state is known for its handicrafts—hand-woven fabric, wood carvings, bamboo items, etc. Sal, garjan, teak and gamari are varieties of wood that are found

in the forests. The climate is warm and humid. The temperature varies between 10 degrees Celsius in the winter to a maximum average of 35 degrees Celsius in summer. Humidity is generally high throughout the year. Monsoon usually arrives in the later part of May or the first week of June and lasts till September. The north-eastern part of the state around Dharmanagar gets the maximum rain. The state has 10 major rivers—Burima, Gomati, Khowai, Haorah, Longai, Dhalai, Muhuri, Feni, Juri and Manu. The Gomati is the largest river and like the Ganga, it is considered as the most sacred of all rivers. Tripura has a diverse ecosystem ranging from forests and grasslands to freshwater wetlands. The soil of Tripura is loamy and sandy, which is red and yellow in colour. Large tracts of alluvium soil consisting of sand, silt and clay can also be found along riverbeds. Over 90 per cent of the land was once covered with dense forests. Today, about 53 per cent of the land is under actual forest cover. Owing to increasing pressure on land, practise of jhum cultivation, unregulated felling of trees and forest fires, much of these forest cover has been replaced by crops. Forests are mainly tropical, evergreen, semi-evergreen and moist deciduous. There are many species of rare, endemic and endangered plants and animals found in the region. The state boasts of a large variety of species of trees, shrubs, herbs, climbers and medicinal plants, many of which are restricted to the state and neighbouring states. Some of the trees that are commonly available in the forests are amalaki, balda, chalita chamal, dongar, mandar, udal, bamboo, etc. Bamboo plays a vital role in the economy as it serves both the artisan and non-artisan users of the state. Nineteen species of bamboo found in the state include Barak, Bari, Kai, Lanthi Bans, Tetua, Dolu, Paora, etc. There are around 90 mammal species found in the state. Seven primate species have been documented in Tripura, of which slow iris and stumped-tailed macaque have become rare. Phayre's langoor, which has become endangered in India, is also found here. As regards birds, nearly 340 species have been reported, of which 58 are migratory. Some of the important birds that are found here are—dora lark, red bulbul, green bulbul, mynah, babul, tuntuni, bhating, pancowri, doyel, etc. (NCERT, 2017).

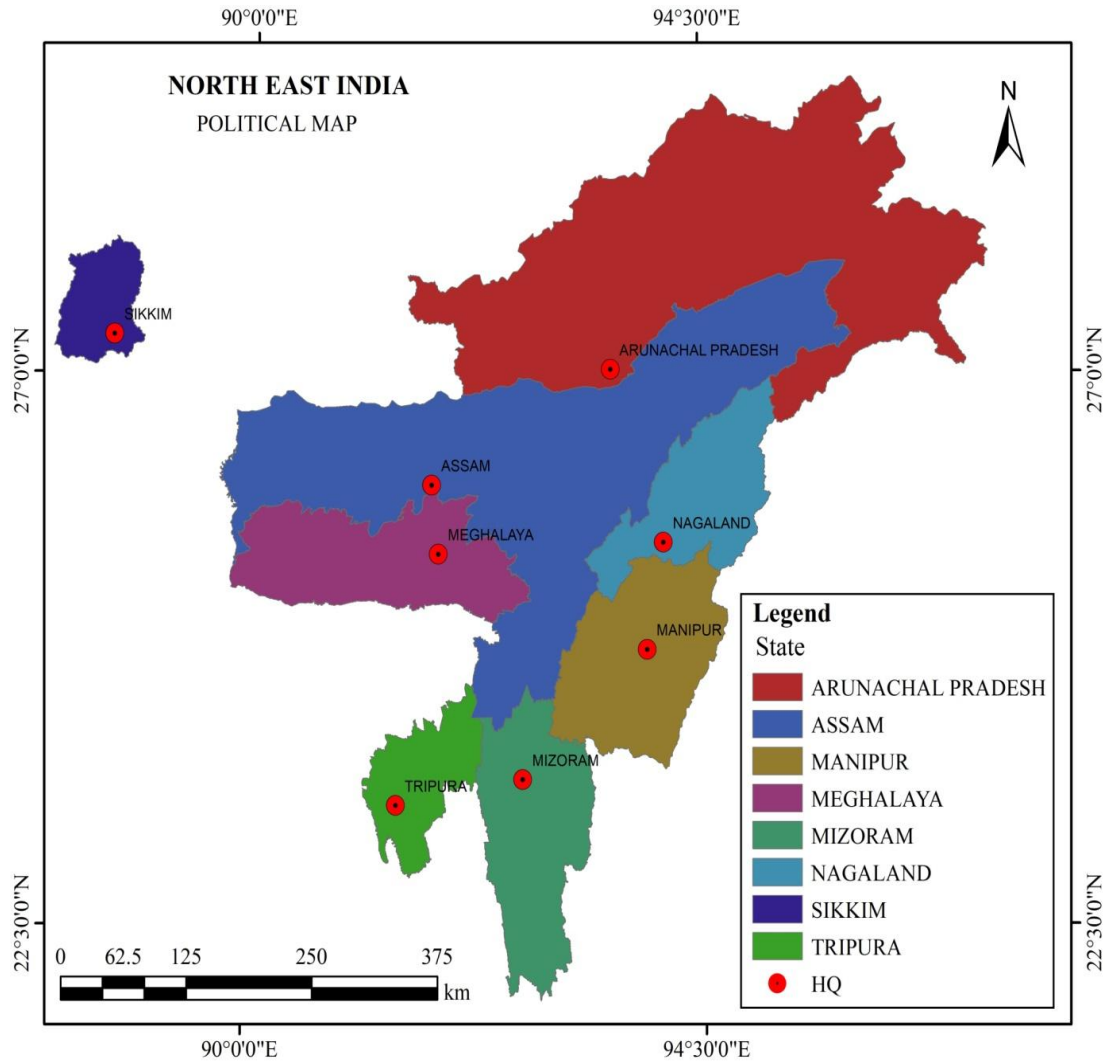
## **Geographical Diversity of Northeast India**

Northeast India is marked by its geographical diversity, which includes hills, plains, rivers, and forests. This diversity has influenced the livelihoods, land use practices, and settlement patterns of the tribal communities in the region. Some key geographic features that influence land rights and women's roles include:

- **Mountainous terrain and hill regions:** Most of the Northeastern states, such as Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram, are dominated by hills and mountains. This terrain influences the agricultural practices, particularly shifting cultivation or jhum cultivation, which is widely practiced in these areas.
- **Plains and river valleys:** Assam and parts of Tripura and Manipur consist of fertile plains and river valleys, where settled agriculture like rice farming is predominant. The Brahmaputra and Barak river valleys in Assam are particularly important for agricultural production.
- **Forests and natural resources:** Large parts of Northeast India are covered with forests, which serve as major sources of livelihood for many tribal communities. Women are involved in forest-based activities such as the collection of firewood, medicinal plants, and other forest products.

The specific geographical conditions of each region heavily influence the economic activities, land use systems, and the customary laws related to land, which in turn affect women's access to and control over land.

Map no. 2.1.1.1: MAP OF NORTHEAST INDIA



Source: Digitised map in Arc GIS.

## 2.2. GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION AND ITS INFLUENCE ON WOMEN-LAND RIGHTS IN NORTHEAST INDIA

The geographical location of Northeast India plays a crucial role in shaping the social, cultural, and economic life of its tribal communities, particularly in the context of land rights. The region, comprising Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura, is known for its hilly terrain, vast forests, and unique biodiversity. It is also home to a wide variety of indigenous

communities, each with distinct customary laws and social practices that govern land ownership and inheritance. The interaction between geography, gender roles, and land rights in Northeast India is complex and multifaceted, with significant variations between matrilineal and patrilineal communities, as well as differences based on environmental factors like topography, agriculture, and natural resources.

### **2.3. CUSTOMARY LAND OWNERSHIP SYSTEMS IN TRIBAL SOCIETIES**

Tribal communities in Northeast India largely follow customary laws when it comes to land ownership. These customs vary from tribe to tribe but tend to share some commonalities. Traditionally, land in most tribal communities is owned by the clan, lineage, or the village as a collective, rather than by individuals. Land is managed by the community or tribal council, and the allocation of land to individuals or families is often overseen by male leaders such as village chiefs or heads of clans.

**2.3.1.(A) Patriarchy and Land Rights** In many tribal societies, land ownership is predominantly patriarchal. Men control decision-making processes related to land distribution and inheritance, while women are generally excluded from these rights. The authority of men over land ownership is deeply rooted in customary practices, where inheritance typically passes through male descendants. As a result, women's access to land is mediated through their relationships with male family members—fathers, husbands, or sons.

**2.3.1.(B) Matrilineal Societies** However, not all tribal societies in Northeast India are patriarchal. Meghalaya's Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia communities, for example, follow matrilineal systems in which inheritance passes through the female line. In these societies, women have more direct access to land and property compared to their counterparts in patrilineal societies. Despite this, matrilineal societies do not necessarily ensure women's control over land, as men often continue to manage or make decisions about land use.

## 2.4. INFLUENCE OF GEOGRAPHY ON LAND USE SYSTEMS

Geography has a direct impact on the type of land use and agricultural practices in different parts of Northeast India. These land use systems, in turn, shape the social norms and customs around land ownership and the roles of women in land management. The hilly regions of the Northeast India inhabited by the tribals have more or less similar land use system that has evolved centuries back and still follows the same.

**2.4.1 Shifting Cultivation in Hill Areas** Shifting cultivation, or jhum, is the dominant agricultural practice in many of the hilly regions of Northeast India, particularly in states like Nagaland, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, and parts of Manipur. This form of cultivation involves clearing patches of forest land, using them for cultivation for a few years, and then moving on to a new area, allowing the forest to regenerate.

- **Impact on Women's Role in Land Use:** In jhum cultivation, women are heavily involved in various agricultural activities, from clearing the land to planting, harvesting, and processing crops. Despite their significant role in agriculture, women's rights to own or inherit land in these hill societies are often limited. In many hill tribes, land is collectively owned by the clan or village, and decisions regarding land distribution are made by male-dominated councils or tribal leaders. The temporary nature of jhum cultivation further complicates the issue of individual land ownership, making it difficult for women to assert long-term rights over land.
- **Challenges in Inheritance:** In patriarchal tribes practicing jhum, such as the Nagas or the Mizos, land is typically inherited through male descendants, leaving women dependent on male relatives for access to land. Even though women contribute significantly to the cultivation process, they are excluded from formal ownership due to customary laws that favour male inheritance.

**2.4.2 Settled Agriculture in the Plains** In contrast to the hill areas, the plains of Assam, parts of Tripura, and Manipur are characterized by settled agriculture, particularly paddy cultivation. In these regions, land ownership tends to be more individualized, with families holding permanent agricultural plots.

- **Impact on Women in Settled Communities:** In these plains' areas, women also play a crucial role in agriculture, especially in labour-intensive tasks such as transplanting rice, weeding, and harvesting. However, women's land rights in these regions are similarly constrained by customary laws. In patriarchal communities, land is passed down from father to son, and women are usually excluded from inheritance. Women can only access lands through their relationships with male relatives—typically their fathers, husbands, or sons.
- **Floodplains and Vulnerability:** The Brahmaputra and Barak River valleys are prone to flooding, which can displace entire communities and lead to land loss. When families are displaced, women often face greater difficulties in reclaiming land, as they lack formal land titles or inheritance rights. This vulnerability to environmental factors such as floods exacerbates the marginalization of women in land ownership.

### **2.4.3. Influence of Matrilineal Societies and Geography**

Not all tribal societies in Northeast India follow a patriarchal system. The Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia tribes of Meghalaya follow matrilineal systems, where inheritance is passed through the female line. In these communities, geography has also played a role in shaping the matrilineal system.

**2.4.4. Matrilineal Land Inheritance in Meghalaya**, known for its hilly terrain and rich forests, has a long history of matrilineal land inheritance. In the Khasi and Garo

communities, the youngest daughter (known as the *ka khadduh* among the Khasi) inherits the ancestral property, and land is passed through the maternal line.

In matrilineal societies, women have stronger claims to land ownership compared to their counterparts in patrilineal communities. The youngest daughter inherits family property, ensuring that the land remains within the maternal lineage. However, even in these matrilineal systems, men often control the management of the land. Male relatives, particularly uncles or brothers, typically make decisions about land use, limiting women's actual authority over the property they inherit.

- **Geographical Context of Matrilineal:** The hilly and forested terrain of Meghalaya may have contributed to the development of the matrilineal system, as the community needed to ensure the continuity of land ownership within families over generations. Women, particularly the youngest daughters, are seen as the custodians of ancestral property, ensuring that land remains within the clan.
- **Limitations of Matrilineal Inheritance:** While women in matrilineal societies like the Khasis have the right to inherit land, this does not necessarily translate into full control over the land. In many cases, men (uncles or brothers) manage and make decisions about land use, limiting women's actual authority. The matrilineal system ensures women's access to land, but it does not necessarily grant them decision-making power, which is still largely dominated by men.

## **2.5. GEOGRAPHICAL ISOLATION AND AUTONOMY**

The geographical isolation of many tribal communities in Northeast India has allowed them to maintain their traditional practices, including customary laws related to land and inheritance. This isolation has also meant that the national legal frameworks, which provide for equal rights to property for women, have had limited influence in the region.

**Autonomous Regions and Customary Laws:** Under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, several tribal areas in Northeast India enjoy autonomous governance, with their own tribal councils governing matters related to land and inheritance. This autonomy has allowed these communities to continue following customary laws, which often exclude women from land ownership.

- **Impact of Autonomy on Women's Rights:** While the autonomy granted to tribal communities protects their cultural practices, it has also meant that gender-discriminatory customs, such as male-only inheritance, persist. Women's access to land is mediated by these customs, which prioritize the collective or male ownership of land, often leaving women dependent on their male relatives.
- **Limited Legal Interventions:** Geographical isolation and political autonomy have limited the reach of national legal reforms aimed at improving women's land rights. Efforts to harmonize customary laws with constitutional provisions on gender equality have often been met with resistance from tribal communities, who view these reforms as a threat to their cultural identity.

**2.5.1 Forests, Natural Resources, and Women's Land Rights:** Forests and natural resources play a vital role in the economy and culture of many tribal communities in Northeast India. Women, in particular, are heavily involved in forest-based activities, such as collecting firewood, medicinal plants, and other forest products, which are crucial for household subsistence.

**2.5.2. Forest Resources and Gendered Access:** In many tribal communities, forests are considered community property, managed by the clan or village council. Women's access to forest resources is often unrestricted for purposes such as gathering firewood, fodder, or medicinal plants. However, formal ownership of forest land is typically controlled by men, either through clan leaders or male members of the family.

- **Impact of Geographical Features on Land Rights:** In forested areas, land rights are closely tied to access to natural resources. While women have access to these resources for subsistence, they are often excluded from decision-making processes about forest management or the use of forest land for agriculture. This gendered division of rights and responsibilities reinforces the marginalization of women in terms of land ownership and control.

**2.5.3. Environmental Vulnerabilities and Women's Land Rights:** Northeast India is particularly vulnerable to environmental challenges, including floods, landslides, and deforestation. These environmental factors further influence land ownership patterns and exacerbate gender disparities in land rights.

**2.5.4. Impact of Environmental Degradation on Women** Environmental degradation, such as deforestation or soil erosion due to jhum cultivation, can lead to the depletion of agricultural land. As land becomes scarcer, competition for ownership intensifies, and women who are already marginalized in terms of land rights are further disadvantaged. In times of environmental crises, such as floods or landslides, women are often displaced and may find it more difficult to reclaim land due to their lack of formal land rights. The geographical location of Northeast India has a profound influence on women's land rights in North East India.

## **2.6. THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN TRIBAL ECONOMIES**

Women in tribal communities of Northeast India play significant roles in agriculture, which is the primary occupation of most tribal societies. They engage in farming, cultivation, and management of natural resources, often working alongside or even more than their male counterparts.

**2.6.1. Women's Contribution to Agriculture** In many tribal communities, women are responsible for critical agricultural tasks such as sowing, weeding, harvesting, and processing crops. They also collect firewood, water, and other resources from common lands. In shifting cultivation (jhum) systems practiced in some parts of the region, women actively participate in the preparation of land, planting of crops, and post-harvest management. Despite their significant contribution to agriculture, women often lack control over the land they work on.

**2.6.2 Economic Dependence and the Gender Gap:** The economic contributions of women are crucial to the survival of tribal households. However, their lack of legal rights to land often results in a power imbalance, where men, by virtue of land ownership, hold economic and social power. This economic dependence can perpetuate gender inequalities and limit women's decision-making capabilities in the household and community.

## **2.7. CUSTOMARY LAWS VS. LEGAL RIGHTS**

India's Constitution grants women equal rights in land ownership and inheritance. However, tribal communities in the Northeast are governed by their own customary laws, which are often exempt from national legal frameworks due to the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. This creates a complex situation where tribal women may be deprived of their constitutional rights because of the predominance of customary norms.

**2.7.1. The Sixth Schedule and Autonomy:** The Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution grants autonomous governance to tribal areas in the Northeast, allowing tribal councils to govern matters related to land, inheritance, and other civil matters according to their customs. While this autonomy protects tribal traditions, it can also be used as tools by certain tribal groups to further perpetuate gender discrimination, as many customary laws do not recognize women's rights to own or inherit land.

**2.7.2. Conflict Between Custom and Modern Law:** In recent years, there has been growing awareness and activism regarding the need to harmonize customary laws with constitutional rights, especially in relation to gender equality. However, this has been met with resistance in many communities, where customs are seen as integral to tribal identity. The tension between modern legal frameworks and traditional systems creates a barrier for women to claim their rightful share of land.

## **2.8. WOMEN AND LAND RIGHTS FROM DIFFERENT TRIBAL COMMUNITIES**

**2.8.1 Khasi Matrilineal Society in Meghalaya:** The Khasi community in Meghalaya is often cited as an example of a matrilineal society where women have inheritance rights. In Khasi culture, the youngest daughter, known as the *ka khadduh*, inherits the family's ancestral property. While this ensures that land remains within the female line, men still hold substantial decision-making power in the community. The matrilineal system does not necessarily translate to matriarchy; in fact, men continue to dominate village councils and local governance. (Nongbri 1988).

**2.8.2 Naga Tribes in Nagaland:** In the Naga tribes of Nagaland, customary laws are predominantly male dominant. Land is inherited by male members of the family, and women are largely excluded from ownership and inheritance. Despite their crucial role in agriculture, Naga women face significant barriers to owning land. However, women's organizations such as the Naga Mothers' Association have been advocating for greater gender equity in land rights, though progress has been slow.

**2.8.3 Mizo Tribes in Mizoram:** In Mizoram, the Mizo tribe follows a patrilineal system of inheritance where land is passed down through male descendants. Women have no right to inherit ancestral property under customary law. However, women's

groups in Mizoram, such as the Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl (MHIP), have been actively working towards reforming customary laws to provide greater land rights for women. The push for legal reforms has gained momentum in recent years, though resistance from traditional institutions remains.

**2.8.4 The Adi Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh:** The Adi tribe, one of the largest tribal groups in Arunachal Pradesh, follows a patriarchal system in which land is traditionally inherited by male descendants. Women in the Adi society contribute significantly to agriculture and household activities, including jhum (shifting) cultivation, but they are excluded from land ownership and inheritance.

Women in the Adi tribe typically access land through their fathers or husbands. Upon marriage, they move to their husband's village, but the land remains under the control of male relatives. Despite their crucial role in food production and resource management, Adi women have limited decision-making power regarding land use and distribution. This restriction reinforces their economic dependence on men and limits their bargaining power in the household and community.

In recent years, there have been efforts by local women's groups to promote gender equality in land rights. The Adi Baane Kebang (ABK), a powerful traditional body that oversees customary practices, has debated the inclusion of women in land inheritance rights, though these changes are gradual and face resistance from conservative factions within the community. Women's groups argue that securing land rights will not only improve women's economic status but also empower them within the community's socio-political framework.

**2.8.5 The Chakma Tribe of Tripura:** The Chakma tribe, primarily residing in Tripura, Mizoram, and parts of Assam, follows a patriarchal system similar to many other tribal communities. In the Chakma society, land inheritance is typically passed down through the male lineage, and women are generally excluded from owning

land. The situation is complicated by the fact that the Chakmas were historically displaced from the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, and many of them do not have legal land titles even today.

Due to the history of displacement and land alienation, Chakma women face additional layers of marginalization. Land insecurity is a pressing issue for the community, and in this context, women's rights to land have been further weakened. While women contribute significantly to agriculture, including rice cultivation, they have no legal claims to the land they work on.

Activists within the Chakma community have been advocating for greater legal recognition of their land claims, but the focus has largely been on securing land for the community rather than addressing gender-based disparities in land ownership. Women's groups are starting to raise awareness about the importance of land rights for women, but significant challenges remain, particularly due to the precarious legal status of the Chakmas in Tripura.

**2.8.6 The Bodo Tribe of Assam:** The Bodo tribe, one of the largest tribal groups in Assam, follows a patriarchal system of land inheritance. (Endle 1911). Traditionally, land is passed down from father to son, and women are generally excluded from ownership. Bodo women, like many other tribal women in the Northeast, play a vital role in agriculture, but they have little control over the land they cultivate.

The Bodo society has been heavily influenced by both tribal customs and external pressures such as modernization and conflict. The region has experienced ethnic conflicts, land disputes, and displacement, all of which have further complicated land ownership patterns. In many cases, Bodo women have been displaced from their ancestral lands due to these conflicts, and their access to land has become even more precarious.

There have been some initiatives by women's organizations in Assam to address land rights issues, including advocating for joint land ownership between

husbands and wives. However, these efforts are often met with resistance from traditional leaders who view land inheritance as a male prerogative. Women's groups argue that secure land rights would not only improve the socio-economic status of Bodo women but also help to stabilize conflict-affected communities by giving women greater control over natural resources.

**2.8.7 The Ao Tribe of Nagaland:** The Ao tribe of Nagaland is part of the larger Naga community, which follows a predominantly patrilineal system of land ownership. In Ao society, land is controlled by men, and inheritance passes from father to son. Ao women, while central to the community's agricultural economy, have very little legal or customary rights to own land. (Longkumer 2015).

In Ao villages, men control all land-related decisions, and women are largely excluded from decision-making bodies like the village council. This creates a significant power imbalance, as men dictate the terms of land use, crop cultivation, and resource management, while women bear much of the labour burden. The patriarchal norms of the Ao tribe reinforce women's economic dependence on their male relative.

Like other parts of Nagaland, there has been a growing movement among Ao women to demand greater equality in land ownership and governance. Women's organizations such as the Naga Mothers' Association and Watsu Mungdang an Ao tribal organization have been instrumental in raising awareness about the need for reforms in customary laws, but progress has been slow due to the deep-rooted nature of patriarchal norms. The debate over women's land rights is tied to broader discussions about the role of women in tribal governance and decision-making processes.

**2.8.8 The Reang Tribe of Mizoram and Tripura:** The Reang tribe, also known as Bru, is an indigenous tribe residing in both Mizoram and Tripura. Similar to other

tribes in the Northeast, the Reang community follows a patriarchal system in which land inheritance is predominant among men. Reang women play an active role in agriculture, especially in jhum cultivation, but they are excluded from ownership and decision-making regarding land.

The Reang tribe has faced repeated displacement, particularly in Mizoram, where ethnic conflicts between the Reangs and the Mizos have led to large-scale displacement and land loss for the community. Reang women have borne the brunt of these displacements, as their lack of legal land rights has made it difficult for them to reclaim or access land after being displaced. This has further exacerbated their vulnerability and economic marginalization.

In recent years, Reang women's groups have started to demand more secure land rights, especially in the context of displacement and resettlement. These groups argue that granting land rights to women would not only empower them economically but also ensure greater stability for displaced families. However, like in other tribal communities, these demands face significant resistance from traditional leaders who uphold patriarchal norms.

**2.8.9 The Mishing Tribe of Assam:** The Mishing tribe, one of Assam's largest plain-dwelling tribal communities, follows a patriarchal system in which men control land ownership and inheritance. Women contribute significantly to the agricultural economy, particularly in rice cultivation and fishing, but they have little control over land.

The Mishing people live in the floodplains of the Brahmaputra River, making them particularly vulnerable to annual floods and displacement. These environmental factors have compounded the land rights issues faced by Mishing women. Displacement due to floods often leaves families landless, and since women do not have legal claims to land, they are particularly vulnerable to poverty and marginalization.

Women's organizations within the Mishing community are beginning to address the issue of land rights by advocating for joint land ownership between husbands and wives. There have been some efforts to engage with government land reform programs to ensure that women receive legal recognition as landowners, but implementation remains slow. Additionally, environmental challenges like frequent flooding complicate the process of securing land rights for both men and women in this community.

These case studies highlight the diversity of tribal communities in Northeast India and the different challenges women face in accessing and controlling land. Despite their critical roles in agriculture and resource management, women across most of these communities are excluded from land ownership due to deeply entrenched patriarchal norms and customary laws. The push for greater gender equality in land rights is growing, but it remains a contentious issue, as customary practices are deeply tied to the cultural identities of these tribal groups.

The case studies from the Adi, Chakma, Bodo, Ao, Reang, and Mishing tribes provide valuable insights into the complexities of land ownership and gender roles in the tribal societies of Northeast India. While there are some differences between these communities, the common theme is the exclusion of women from land ownership and the resultant socio-economic implications. Women's organizations are increasingly advocating for legal reforms and the inclusion of women in decision-making processes, but significant barriers remain due to the dominance of patriarchal customs and resistance to changing long-standing traditions.

## **2.9. WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS AND ADVOCACY FOR LAND RIGHTS**

Across the Northeast, women's organizations and activists have been advocating for reforms to customary laws that deny women their land rights. These movements aim to strike a balance between preserving tribal customs and promoting gender equality.

**2.9.1. The Role of Women's Organizations:** Women's organizations have played a pivotal role in raising awareness about the importance of land rights for women's empowerment. These groups have been instrumental in pushing for legal reforms, challenging patriarchal customs, and advocating for the inclusion of women in decision-making processes related to land ownership.

**2.9.2. Legal Reforms and Policy Initiatives:** There have been some policy initiatives aimed at addressing gender inequalities in land ownership. For instance, land reform policies in some states of Northeast India have started to acknowledge the need for women's land rights, though these reforms are often limited in scope and face significant implementation challenges.

## **2.10. CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

Despite the growing awareness of the need for gender equity in land ownership, women in tribal communities continue to face numerous challenges.

**2.10.1. Resistance to Change:** One of the biggest challenges to improving women's land rights in tribal communities is the resistance to changing customary laws. Traditional leaders and elders often view these customs as integral to their cultural identity and are reluctant to alter them, even when they perpetuate gender inequality.

**2.10.2. Economic and Environmental Pressures:** The changing economic landscape in the Northeast, with increasing commercialization of agriculture and land, has added another layer of complexity to land rights issues. In some cases, the commercialization of land has led to its concentration in the hands of a few, further marginalizing women who are already excluded from land ownership.

**2.10.3. Opportunities for Change:** There is growing recognition among policymakers, civil society, and some tribal leaders that women's land rights are essential for achieving gender equality and sustainable development. As more women's groups continue to advocate for reforms, and as legal frameworks evolve, there is potential for positive change in the future.

The issue of women's land rights in tribal communities of Northeast India is deeply intertwined with customary laws, cultural norms, and economic practices. While there are some variations between matrilineal and patrilineal societies, women in both systems often find themselves marginalized when it comes to owning and controlling land. The movement toward greater gender equality in land rights is gaining momentum, but significant challenges remain, particularly in overcoming resistance to changing long-standing customs. Ensuring that women have equal access to land is not only a matter of justice but is also critical for the economic and social development of tribal communities in the Northeast.

## 2.11. LEGAL REFORMS AND NATIONAL FRAMEWORKS

The issue of women's land rights in Northeast India is deeply embedded in the tension between national legal frameworks that seek to promote gender equality and the customary laws of tribal communities that often marginalize women in matters of inheritance and land ownership. While the Indian Constitution and national laws advocate for equal rights, their implementation in the Northeast is complicated by the region's unique legal and constitutional protections that prioritize tribal autonomy and customary practices. Below is a detailed exploration of the legal reforms and frameworks relevant to women's land rights in the region.

**2.11.1. The Indian Constitution and Gender Equality:** The Constitution of India provides a strong foundation for gender equality, including equal rights to property and land ownership. Several provisions are particularly relevant to the issue of women's land rights.

- **Article 14** guarantees the right to equality before the law and equal protection of the laws, which implies that men and women should have equal rights to property and land.
- **Article 15(1)** prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth, reinforcing the idea that women should have equal rights, including to property and inheritance.
- **Article 39(a)** of the Directive Principles of State Policy mandates that men and women equally have the right to an adequate means of livelihood, which extends to land and property ownership.

However, these constitutional provisions often do not have a direct impact on tribal areas of Northeast India, which are governed by customary laws under special provisions granted by the Constitution.

2.11.2. **The Hindu Succession Act (1956) and Amendments (2005):** The Hindu Succession Act of 1956 was a landmark piece of legislation aimed at reforming the property rights of Hindu women by providing them with the right to inherit property. Before this law, women had limited rights to inherit ancestral property, often receiving only a life interest, which meant they could not sell or fully control the property.

- **Key Features of the Act:** The original Act granted women a share in the property of their father, but the size of the share was often smaller than that of male heirs. The Act did not apply to tribal communities, which were governed by their own customary laws.
- **The 2005 Amendment:** A significant step toward gender equality came with the amendment of the Hindu Succession Act in 2005, which gave daughters equal rights to inherit ancestral property, along with their brothers. The amendment recognized daughters as coparceners (joint heirs) in Hindu undivided families, allowing them to claim a share of ancestral property.

While this amendment was a progressive step for Hindu women, its impact has been limited in the Northeast due to two main reasons:

1. **Non-Applicability to Tribal Communities:** The Hindu Succession Act does not apply to tribal communities unless they specifically choose to adopt it. Most tribal communities in the Northeast, particularly in states like Nagaland, Mizoram, and Arunachal Pradesh, follow their own customary laws, which generally exclude women from inheriting land. Therefore, the benefits of the 2005 amendment have not reached women in these regions.
2. **Customary Law Supersedes National Law:** In tribal areas governed by the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, customary laws have precedence over national legal frameworks like the Hindu Succession Act. These customary laws are often patriarchal and do not recognize women's independent right to own or inherit land.

2.11.3. **The Sixth Schedule and Tribal Autonomy:** The Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution grants special autonomy to tribal areas in the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram. It allows tribal communities to govern themselves through autonomous district councils (ADCs) that have the power to make laws on matters such as land use, inheritance, and village administration. These councils are empowered to preserve and apply customary laws, which often exclude women from inheriting land.

- **Autonomous District Councils (ADCs):** ADCs have significant control over land administration in Sixth Schedule areas. They are responsible for governing matters related to the ownership, use, and inheritance of land. Customary practices, which are usually patriarchal, are often codified by these councils, leaving little room for national legal reforms that promote gender equality to take effect.
- **Impact on Women's Land Rights:** While the Sixth Schedule protects the cultural autonomy of tribal communities, it also entrenches gender

discrimination in land ownership. Women in these areas often have limited recourse to national laws like the Hindu Succession Act, as the ADCs prioritize customary practices that deny women the right to inherit or own land.

Efforts to introduce gender-sensitive reforms within the framework of the Sixth Schedule have faced resistance from tribal leaders who argue that such reforms threaten the cultural identity of their communities.

2.11.4. The Indian Succession Act (1925)\: The Indian Succession Act of 1925 is another legal framework that governs inheritance in India. This Act applies to individuals who are not covered by personal or customary laws, including Christians, Parsis, and those who do not identify with specific religious traditions. The Act provides for equal inheritance rights for men and women.

- **Limited Applicability in Tribal Areas:** Like the Hindu Succession Act, the Indian Succession Act does not apply to tribal areas where customary laws prevail. However, for Christian communities in the Northeast, such as some tribal groups in Mizoram and Nagaland, this Act provides for equal inheritance rights for women.
- **Role in Christian Tribal Communities:** In Christian-majority tribal communities, such as the Mizos, there is some scope for women to inherit land under the Indian Succession Act. However, even here, customary practices often take precedence, and many families follow patriarchal traditions that exclude women from property inheritance.

2.11.5. Special Provisions for Tribal Areas: Article 371 and Its Implications: In addition to the Sixth Schedule, the Constitution provides special protections for tribal communities under Article 371, which applies to various Northeastern states like Nagaland (Article 371A), Mizoram (Article 371G), and Manipur (Article 371C).

- **Article 371A (Nagaland):** Article 371A allows Nagaland to govern itself according to its customary laws, especially in matters related to land, resources, and religion. This provision explicitly states that no act of Parliament shall apply to Nagaland unless approved by the Nagaland Legislative Assembly. This autonomy means that national legal reforms, such as those related to women's property rights, do not apply in the state unless the state legislature chooses to adopt them.
- **Article 371G (Mizoram):** Similarly, Article 371G grants Mizoram the power to preserve its customary laws related to land ownership and family matters. This has resulted in the continuation of patriarchal inheritance practices, where women are excluded from land ownership despite their significant contributions to the agricultural economy.

While Article 371 provisions protect tribal autonomy, they have also acted as a barrier to the implementation of legal reforms that could improve gender equality in land rights.

2.11.6. Attempts to Harmonize Customary Laws with Gender Equality: There have been efforts to reconcile the customary laws of tribal communities with national legal standards on gender equality. However, these efforts have encountered resistance from tribal leaders and communities who fear that changes to customary law could erode their cultural identity.

- **Resistance from Tribal Communities:** Tribal leaders and communities in the Northeast often view national legal reforms as an imposition on their traditional way of life. For instance, attempts to apply the Hindu Succession Act or other national laws to tribal areas have been met with opposition on the grounds that they threaten the community's autonomy and customs. This resistance is particularly strong in states like Nagaland and Mizoram, where customary laws are seen as central to the tribal identity.

- **Calls for Reform from Women’s Groups:** Despite the resistance, women’s organizations and activists in the region have been advocating for greater gender equality in land rights. Groups like the **Naga Mothers’ Association (NMA)** in Nagaland and women’s rights advocates in Meghalaya have called for reforms to customary laws that would allow women to inherit and control land. These movements have been gaining momentum but face significant cultural and legal challenges.

**2.11.7. National Initiatives for Women’s Land Rights:** The Indian government has launched various initiatives to improve land rights for women, though their impact in the Northeast remains limited due to the dominance of customary laws. Some of these initiatives include:

- **Women’s Empowerment and Gender Budgeting:** Several state and national-level programs aim to promote women’s empowerment, including land rights. Gender budgeting, which allocates resources to address gender disparities, has been used to promote women’s access to land in other parts of India, though it has seen limited success in the Northeast due to legal and cultural barriers.
- **Land Title Programs:** National programs to provide land titles to women, such as joint titling for land owned by married couples, have been implemented in parts of India. These programs aim to increase women’s access to land ownership. However, in the Northeast, the effectiveness of such programs is often hindered by customary laws that do not recognize women’s land rights.

The challenge of ensuring equal land rights for women in Northeast India lies in balancing the autonomy of tribal communities with the principles of gender equality enshrined in the Indian Constitution. While national legal frameworks like the Hindu Succession Act and the Indian Succession Act have made significant strides in promoting women’s property rights in other parts of India, their reach in

the Northeast is limited by the region's unique legal status under the Sixth Schedule and Article 371 provisions.

Efforts to reform customary laws and improve women's land rights must navigate the cultural sensitivities and autonomy of tribal communities, while also addressing the significant gender inequalities that persist. Women's organizations, activists, and progressive elements within tribal communities will play a critical role.

## **CHAPTER-3**

### **WOMEN-LAND RELATIONSHIP AMONG THE BODO COMMUNITY**

The relationship between women and land is as intertwined as the relationship between tribal people and their surrounding nature. Land is not just a resource but it's a medium of connecting oneself with their roots. Among the human beings, despite of the gender has a close relationship from the time immemorial in the entire world. Be it in terms of settlement, agricultural activities, economic activities, political aspects etc. Land not just has a linkage with settlement, cultivation, economy and politics, yet land is also associated deeply with the societal framework, cultural and religious aspects of human being.

Bodo are one of the oldest tribal communities in Northeast India, basically in Assam. Being a tribal community the value and significance of land can be seen in their tradition. The struggles and the movements that the Bodo community had faced in the past and still confronting for acquiring and protecting their land is worth mentioning. Starting from the core of the community such as the cultural setup, societal framework, religious practices; land has the most important role. Whenever we talk about society, culture and religion it will be incomplete if the role of Bodo women were not mentioned.

#### **3.1 GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND OF BODOLAND TERRITORIAL AREA DISTRICTS (B.T.A.D.)**

Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (B.T.A.D.) is in the Northern bank of the Mighty river Brahmaputra, flowing through Assam. It stretches parallel to the river Brahmaputra towards North. It share an international boundary that extends till the Bhutan border in the Northern part of the four districts of B.T.A.D. Located in the extreme end of the Western Assam, shares the state boundary with West Bengal in the West. It extends from 26°7'12"N to 26°47'50" N Latitude and 89°47'40" E to

92°18'30" E Longitude. It has a total land area of 8970 sq.km., having a density of 326 persons/sq.km. It has a total population of 3.1 million according to the 2011 census.

### **3.1.1 Topography**

B.T.A.D. features a varied topographical landscape ranging from plains, alluvial floodplains, to the lower Himalayan foothills. The terrain slopes gently from the north (foothills of Bhutan) towards the south, gradually merging with the plains of Assam. The northern region is hilly and forested, part of the Eastern Himalayas, while the central and southern parts consist of fertile alluvial plains formed by the Brahmaputra River and its tributaries.

### **3.1.2 Rivers and Water Systems**

The most prominent river system in BTAD is the Brahmaputra River, which runs along the southern boundary of the region. Other important rivers include the Sankosh, Aie, Gaurang, Dhansiri, and the Puthimari, which originate from the Bhutan foothills and drain the region before merging into the Brahmaputra. These rivers create fertile alluvial plains that are suitable for agriculture but also make the region prone to seasonal flooding, especially during the monsoon months.

### **3.1.3 Climate and Weather Patterns**

Monsoon Climate BTAD experiences a humid subtropical monsoon climate with three distinct seasons: summer, monsoon, and winter.

- Summer (March to May): Temperatures range between 25°C to 38°C. The summers are generally hot and humid.

- Monsoon (June to September): The region receives heavy rainfall, often exceeding 2000 mm annually, brought by the southwest monsoon. This season is marked by floods that affect agriculture and rural life.
- Winter (October to February): Winters are mild and dry, with temperatures between 10°C to 20°C.

The climate and rainfall pattern heavily influence the agricultural practices of the region, with rice and tea being the dominant crops.

### **3.1.4 Natural Vegetation and Forests**

A significant portion of BTAD is covered by dense forests, particularly in the northern hilly areas. These forests fall within the broader Eastern Himalayan Biodiversity Hotspot and are home to a variety of flora and fauna. Major forest reserves include the Manas National Park (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) and parts of the Chirang and Ripu Reserves.

- Flora: The forests are primarily tropical evergreen and semi-evergreen with species like sal (*Shorea robusta*), teak (*Tectona grandis*), bamboo, and various medicinal plants.
- Fauna: BTAD's forests support endangered species like the Indian rhinoceros, Bengal tiger, Asian elephant, and the rare golden langur. Manas National Park is particularly significant for its biodiversity.

### **3.1.5 Soil**

The region's soil is predominantly alluvial in the plains, brought down by the Brahmaputra and its tributaries. These soils are fertile and well-suited for rice, which

is the staple crop. In the northern hilly regions, the soil is lateritic and slightly acidic, supporting the growth of tea, bamboo, and some horticultural crops.

### **3.1.6 Agriculture Practices**

Agriculture is the backbone of the economy in BTAD. The main crops grown include:

- Rice (both winter and summer varieties)
- Tea (plantations in the foothills and plains)
- Jute
- Mustard
- Sugarcane
- Bamboo

Rice cultivation relies on the monsoon, and irrigation facilities are limited. Shifting agriculture (jhum) is practiced in the hilly areas, though it has led to soil erosion and deforestation in some regions.

## **3.2 PROFILE OF BODOLAND TERRITORIAL AREA DISTRICTS (B.T.A.D.)**

The Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) is a territorial council established in Assam state of India according to the Memorandum of Settlement of February 10, 2003. BTC came into existence immediately after surrender of Bodo Liberation Tigers Force (BLTF) cadres. The BLTF laid down their weapons on December 6, 2003, under the leadership of Hagrama Mohilary and later he was sworn in as the Chief Executive Member (CEM) on 8<sup>th</sup> April, 2003 till 14<sup>th</sup> December 2020. The BTC has 46 executive members each looking after a specific area of control called somosthi. The area under the BTC jurisdiction is called the Bodoland Territorial

Area District (B.T.A.D.). The B.T.A.D. consist of four contiguous districts- Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri carved out of seven existing districts Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Darrang and Sonitpur. B.T.A.D. is created under the sixth schedule of the Constitution of India. It covers the 35% of the total land of Assam. It is a home to around 35% of marginalised Tribal groups like Bodos, Rabhas, Garos, etc. The agro-based economy is the main source of livelihood of the people. Industrialisation and other employment opportunities are scant and rare in practise.(B.T.C., official website).

### **3.3. HISTORY OF ORIGIN OF B.T.A.D.**

Originally a part of ancient Kamarupa this region came under the control of Koch-Mech king Vishwa Singha in the early 16th century. It was part of a region delineated for the first time around 1562 when the successor king Nara Narayan determined that the Meches and Koches peoples north of the newly constructed Gohain Kamal Ali could follow their indigenous customs whereas peoples to its south had to follow Hindu Brahmanical rites. After the split of the Koch kingdom and subsequent collapse of the eastern Koch Hajo due to the Mughals and during the period of Ahom-Mughal conflicts in early 17th century the Bhutan kingdom pushed south and took control of the region down to the Gohain Kamal Ali. By the end of the 17th century the Ahom kingdom had extended their control up to the Manas River, and the region north of the Gohain Kamal Ali became divided into different Duars each having individual administrative mechanisms that the Bhutan kingdom and the Ahom kingdom shared. The Duars in the Goalpara region (which was outside the Ahom kingdom) were under Bhutan's control, the Duars in the Kamrup region were shared under the Posa system and the Duars in the Darrang region were alternately controlled by the Bhutanese and the Ahoms in an annual cycle. After the British took control of Ahom kingdom in 1826, they maintained the Ahom-Bhutan arrangement somewhat and following the Duar War in 1865 took complete possession of the Duars and removed Bhutanese interest for good.(B.T.C, official).

### **3.3.1. Peace agreements signed in 1993 and 2003**

Following an agreement in 1993, Bodoland became an autonomous administrative unit constituted under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India covering an area of 8,795 km<sup>2</sup> administered by the Bodoland Autonomous Council. Following a further peace agreement, the Bodoland Territorial Council was formed in 2003, with a mission to accomplish development around economic, education, preservation of land right, linguistic aspiration, socio-culture and ethnic identity of Bodos and above all to speed up the infrastructure development of communities in the Bodoland area. The actual functioning of the council was started on 7 December 2003 by constituting the 12 members of the Council provisionally. After the Council Election on 13 May 2005 and subsequent bye-election in November 2005, the 40-member Legislative Council has been formed to look after the development works in the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts. The remaining six members are nominated by the Governor of Assam from the unrepresented Communities. Thus, there are altogether 46 members of the council, representing all communities of BTC Area known as Member of Council Legislative Assembly (MCLA). (B.T.C., official).

### **3.3.2. Peace agreement and the formation of the Bodoland Territorial Region 2020**

A new peace agreement was signed on 27 January 2020 between the Government of India and the Government of Assam on one side and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland, (NDFB) the All-Bodo Students' Union and United Bodo People's Organisation on the other. Under the terms of this agreement, a Bodoland Territorial Region was formed with enhanced executive and legislative powers. The Bodoland Territorial Council will have competency over almost all areas defined by the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and its membership will be increased to 60. The boundary of BTR will be redrawn to make Boro speakers majority within the region. This will be done by forming new districts and the boundary of the region will be adjusted to include contiguous Bodo inhabited areas from neighbouring districts and exclude the non-Bodo inhabited territories

which are currently under the jurisdiction of the BTC. Bodoland will also have the right to be represented at national level sports and cultural events such as the National Games of India and the Khelo India Youth Games. Agreement also makes the Bodo language with Devnagri script an associate official language of Assam.

### 3.4. DEMOGRAPHY AND POPULATION COMPOSITION OF B.T.A.D

Demographically the region is very diverse. It is a home not just to the Bodos but other tribal and non-tribal people as well. The maximum share of the population in the area is dominated by Bodo people and other tribal communities such as Rabha, Garo, Santhali, Nepali in majority. Apart from the tribal communities, other non-tribal communities as also predominantly present in the area. Communities such as Assamese, Bengali, Rajbongshi are occupied in certain parts of the districts of B.T.A.D. The region has maximum of rural areas having higher population in the rural areas and confining lesser population in the urban areas. The following table of demographic structure shows the population size in total as well as in urban and rural areas separately.

Table no.3.4.1: Demographic profile of B.T.A.D. according to 2011 census.

DISTRICTS	TOTAL POPULATION		MALE		FEMALE	
		%	TOTAL	%	TOTAL	%
KOKRAJHAR	887142	28.15	452905	14.37	434237	13.78
CHIRANG	482162	15.30	244860	7.77	237302	7.53
BAKSA	950075	30.15	481330	15.28	468745	14.88
UDALGURI	831668	26.39	421617	13.38	410051	13.01
TOTAL=	3151047	100.00	1600712	50.80	1550335	49.20

Source: Census of India, 2011.

The above table of demographic profile depicts the population size of entire study area i.e. B.T.A.D. (According to 2011 census). The total population of the study area is 3151047, out of which the male population is comprised of 50.80% and

female comprises of 49.20%. The population here is composed of various communities. However, the maximum population share is of the Bodo community. The four districts mentioned above in the table is the dominant native place of Bodo community people. Thus, the population share is more of Bodo and other sister tribes in the area.

Out of the four districts of B.T.A.D. Kokrajhar is the Head quarter of Bodoland Territorial Council (B.T.C.). Despite of it being the head quarter its population is comparatively less to one of its districts of B.T.A.D. i.e. Baksa district. The reason behind Baksa having more population is the area of the district. The other reason behind the district having more population is the composition of the population from various communities. The district of Baksa is comprised of various communities as the district is curved out of numerous districts of Assam such as Barpeta, Bongaigaon, Nalbari which has maximum nontribal population from communities like Assamese, Bengali, Koch Rajbongshi, Nepali, Tea tribes, Rabha, Garo, etc.

Apart from that the population of Kokrajhar and Udalguri goes hand in hand. There population size is also composed of both tribal and non-tribal population. As both the districts are too curved out of other districts of Assam, thus the population has a mixture of various other communities. The district of Chirang is the smallest and least population districts of B.T.A.D. The population size is 482162 according to 2011 census of which male comprises of only 7.77% and female of 7.53% to the total of B.T.A.D. male female population size.

Table no. 3.4.2: Urban Population of B.T.A.D. according to 2011 census.

URBAN POPULATION					
TOTAL	%	MALE	%	FEMALE	%
54941	39.22	28459	20.31	26482	18.90
35337	25.22	17965	12.82	17372	12.40
12242	8.74	6303	4.50	5939	4.24
37574	26.82	19175	13.69	18399	13.13
140094	100.00	71902	51.32	68192	48.68

Source: Census of India, 2011.

The Bodoland Territorial Area District (B.T.A.D.) has a maximum of area under forest or is moreover identified as rural area. Thus, the population size of B.T.A.D. is less in the urban areas. Kokrajhar being the head quarter has the maximum population concentration in the urban areas in comparison to the other districts mentioned in the table. Even though the urban population is more in the district of Kokrajhar, it does not mean the area has maximum urban concentration. Its reason behind having maximum population in urban is because of the Bodoland Territorial Council and its Secretariat office, where many people are directly or indirectly engaged with. All the administrative work of B.T.A.D. functions in Kokrajhar district. Thus, the population flow in the Kokrajhar town is more. Moreover, just like the other districts of B.T.A.D. the population is more concentrated in the rural areas too in the district of Kokrajhar.

The district of Baksa on the other hand, despite of having the highest population concentration, the district accounts with the least urban population record according to the 2011 census. The reason behind such scenario is because of the area having more villages than towns. Thus, the population is more concentrated in the rural areas than in the urban.

Apart from that the districts of Chirang and Udalguri comparatively has moderate urban population concentration. The population in the urban areas in Chirang is focused more due to the presence of Bongaigaon Refinery. The people are directly or indirectly engaged and related to the refinery, focussing and concentrating more people in the town area. Moreover, the population in the district of Udalguri are basically focused more on the census towns and saturated towns of the district.

The reason behind having less population in the urban is because of the smaller number of identified towns in all the four districts of B.T.A.D. Overall, the four districts are connected in a linear pattern with National Highway 31. Because of that the areas where the NH31 touches are more highly concentrated leading to growth in various businesses and economic activities. Though the district headquarters of Kokrajhar, Baksa and Udalguri has no link with the NH31, still the population concentrations in the towns of these districts are present. Nevertheless,

the population concentrations in the rural areas in all the four districts are more in comparison to the urban areas.

Table no. 3.4.3: Rural Population of B.T.A.D. according to 2011 census.

RURAL POPULATION					
TOTAL	%	MALE	%	FEMALE	%
832201	27.64	424446	14.10	407755	13.54
446825	14.84	226895	7.54	219930	7.30
937833	31.15	475027	15.78	462806	15.37
794094	26.37	402442	13.37	391652	13.01
3010953	100.00	1528810	50.77	1482143	49.23

Source: Census of India, 2011.

The population of the four districts mentioned in the table are found to have more concentration in the rural areas. The reason is mainly because the area comes under forest area especially in the Northern part of all the districts and sharing its international border with Bhutan. The other main reason is that the numbers of village are more in the area than the number of towns. Thus, the population in the area are identified to be residing in the villages than in the urban hubs.

The population concentration of an area is directly proportionate to the economic activities of the resident people. All the four districts have maximum population associated with agriculture and primary based economic activities. Thus, the area is still intact with the rural norms and practices of villages keeping the intricacy of population residing in the village areas.

The highest population concentration amongst the four districts is occupied by Baksa district, followed by Kokrajhar, Udalguri and lastly Chirang district. All the four districts are majorly concentrated with remote locations thus the identification of those areas is mostly as villages. Difficulty lays here the most in terms of development of those areas, that the execution of government schemes and other developmental activities are less. This has created immense issues to upgrade any of those areas as saturated or census towns. Another reason is the area comes under forest villages, where the population distribution is sparse. Thus, those areas

especially located in the remote north are still lacking in attaining basic developmental activities to rise like other parts of the districts. Altogether, due to numerous reasons the four districts of B.T.A.D. are having maximum rural areas with a greater number of villages than towns. This has led to the population distribution of the area more in the villages followed by a greater number of people directly or indirectly engaging in the primary based economic activities in the area.

### 3.5. District wise profile of B.T.A.D.

#### 3.5.1. Kokrajhar District

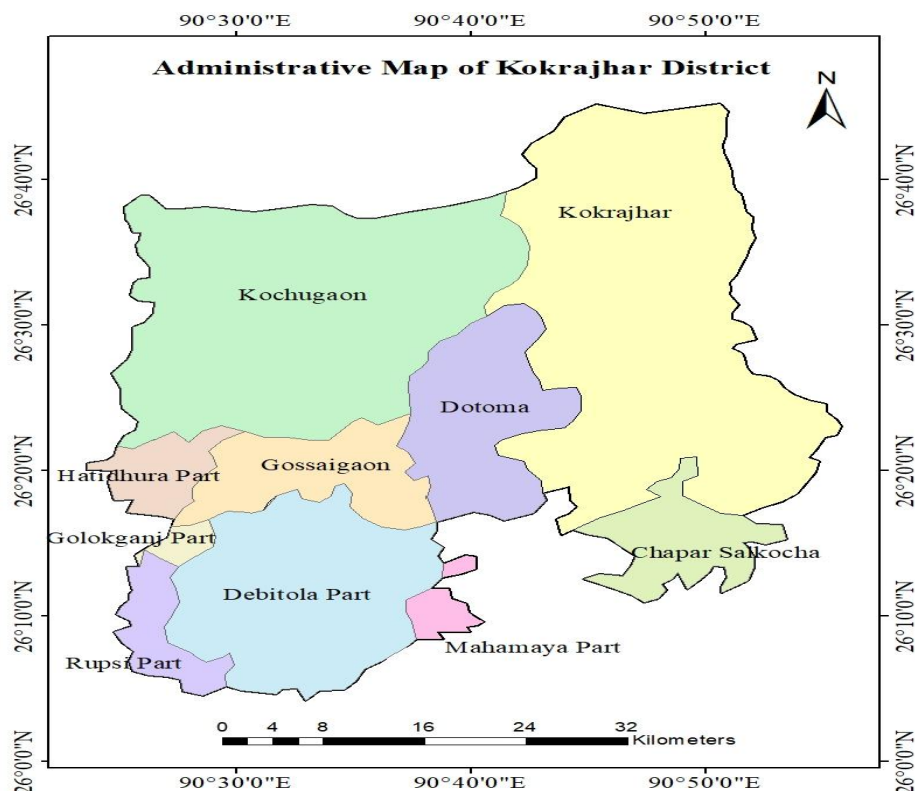
The geographical co-ordinate of the Kokrajhar district extends from 26°18' N to 26°54' N latitudes and 89°46' E to 90°58' E longitudes. This district is geographically located on the northern bank of river Brahmaputra. It is the gateway to the seven sister states of Northeast India. It is bounded in the north by Bhutan, in the east by the district of Chirang and Bongaigaon, in the south by the Dhubri district and in the west by the state of West Bengal. The district extends on the north side of the river Brahmaputra. The district has a total area of 3169.22 sq. km which is of 4.04% of the total area of Assam with (78.438.00 sq. km.). In comparison to the other districts of Assam, Kokrajhar ranks 19th in terms of area.

Table no. 3.5.1.1: Administrative divisions of Kokrajhar District.

Administration Data of Kokrajhar District								
Name of district	No. of Sub Division	No. of C.D. Blocks	No. of Rev. Circle	No. of Towns	No. of S.Towns	No. of Census Towns	No. of V.C.D.C	No. of Village
Kokrajhar	3	11	9	4	2	2	134	1064

Source: No.GAG(B)137/2002/Pt/117 dated 30.10.2011.(Kokrajhar District Hand Book)

Map no. 3.5.1.1: Map of Kokrajhar District with C.D. Blocks.



Source: Digitised map in Arc GIS.

### 3.5.2. Chirang District

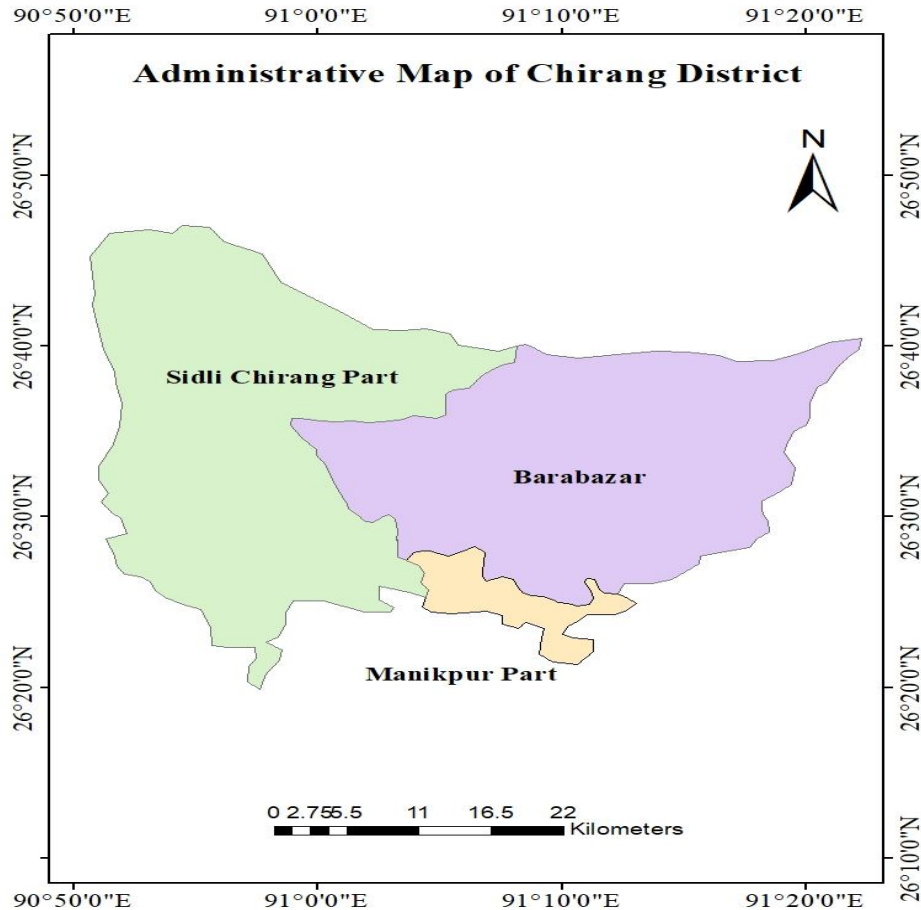
Chirang is one of the four districts of the state Assam created after Census, 2001. Etymologically, the word "Chirang" has been derived from Garo word "Chi" means Water and "Rang" means Wealth. The district has been carved out from Bongaigaon, Kokrajhar and Barpeta districts in 2004 vide notification No.GAG(B)137/2002/Pt/117 dated 30.10.2011.(Chirang District Handbook)

Table no. 3.5.2.1: Administrative divisions of Chirang District.

Administration Data of Chirang District								
Name of district	No. of Sub Division	No. of C.D. Blocks	No. of Rev. Circle	No. of Towns	No. of S.Towns	No. of Census Towns	No. of V.C.D.C	No. of Villages
Chirang	2	3	6	3	2	1	67	508

Source: No.GAG(B)137/2002/Pt/117 dated 30.10.2011.(Chirang District Handbook)

Map no. 3.5.2.1: Map of Chirang District with C.D. Blocks.



Source: Digitised map in Arc GIS.

### 3.5.3. Baksa District

Baksa is one of the four new districts of the state Assam created in Census, 2001. The original word 'Baksa' is not above controversy; a good chunk of population prefers to use 'Baksa' in lieu of 'Baksa'. The popular assumption that 'Baksa' is the misspelt form of 'Bangsa'--a 'Dzonkha' word meaning a farmhouse and a corridor as it is known that Bhutanese king and subjects used this area for trade and passage to the plains. 'Bangsa' (Baksa or Baksa) was in fact one of the most important 'Dooars' of Bhutan. Another source says that the name "Baksa" is originated from Bhutanese language. According to Bhutanese origin they denoted the

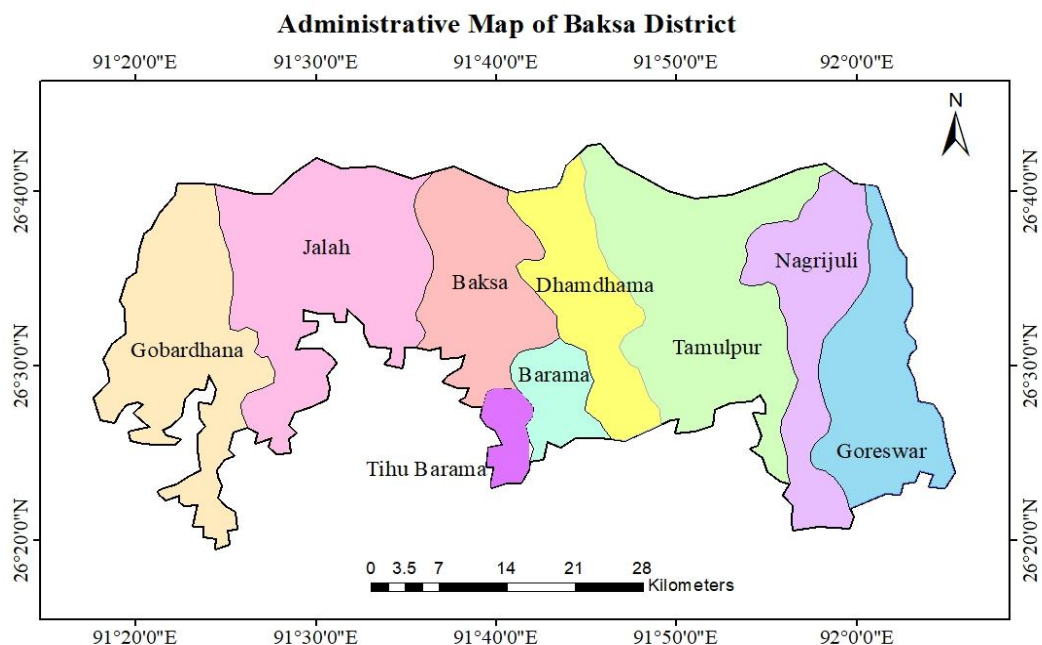
area as "Baksa Duar". "Baksa" means one kind of rice and "Duar" means entrance point. As Bhutanese king ruled these areas for a long time in an around first half of the nineteenth, so it might be possible that the name "Baksa" or "Baksa" had a Bhutanese origin. According to Bodo source the name originated from a kind of rice grain which is known as "Baksa". The said rice grain is one kind of broken and unclean product which is gained after milling rice.

Table no. 3.5.3.1: Administrative divisions of Baksa District.

Administration Data of Baksa District								
Name of district	No. of Sub Division	No. of C.D. Blocks	No. of Rev. Circle	No. of Towns	No. of S.Towns	No. of Census Towns	No. of V.C.D.C	No. of Villages
Baksa	3	8	13	2	0	2	104	690

Source: No.GAG(B)137/2002/Pt/117 dated 30.10.2011.(Baksa District Handbook)

Map no. 3.5.3.1: Map of Baksa District with C.D. Blocks.



Source: Digitised map in Arc GIS.

### 3.5.4. Udalguri District

The name of the district is derived from its headquarters, Udalguri. There are three traditions regarding the etymology of Udalguri. According to one tradition, the name is derived from Odal (a tree) and Guri (roots or surrounding) and it was named because originally the town developed around an Odal tree.

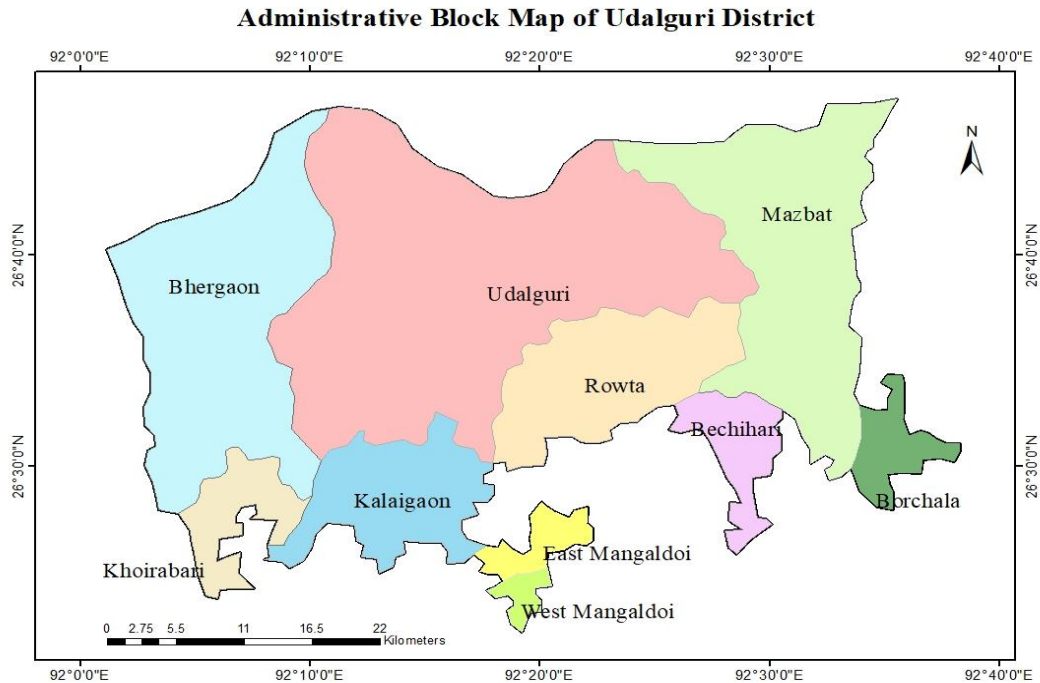
According to another tradition, this town derived its name because this place was originally a hermitage of sage Uddalaka. According to the third tradition, the name is derived from two Bodo words Ordlā (wide and spacious) and Gundri (powdered object). As Udalguri has been carved out mainly from the erstwhile Darrang district, we must look back to the history of the undivided Darrang District to trace back the origin. We find that the name of the district has been originated from Darrang Raja, a branch of Koch Kings. The present Mangaldoi area was at that time known as Darrang Desh, even after annexation of Assam by the British in 1826.

Table no. 3.5.4.1: Administrative divisions of Udalguri District.

Administration Data of Udalguri District								
Name of district	No. of Sub Division	No. of C.D. Blocks	No. of Rev. Circle	No. of Towns	No. of S.Towns	No. of Census Towns	No. of V.C.D. C	No. of Villages
Udalguri	2	9	9	3	2	1	110	800

Source: No.GAG(B)137/2002/Pt/117 dated 30.10.2011.(Udalguri District Handbook)

Map no. 3.5.4.1: Map of Udalguri District with C.D. Blocks.



Source: Digitised map in Arc GIS.

### 3.6 SOCIAL, CULTURAL, HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF BODO

Bodos are the ethnic, linguistic and the largest sub branch community of the Kachari Group and is a dominant as well as indigenous tribal group of the northern valleys of the mighty river Brahmaputra in Assam. Like many other communities, Bodos also have their oral history in the form of folklores, stories of kings and kingdoms as well as the warrior history. The ancestral travel history of Bodos does not have any written record. The Bodo language used to have a script called Deodhai in ancient time, but the details about it has been lost. Presently Devanagari script is used for writing the Bodo language. Prior to the implementation of Devanagari script, Assamese script and Latin script were used for writing the Bodo language. (Brahma, 2015).

As Bodos belongs to one of the tribal communities, they have a close and intimate relationship with their land. Stating from cultural, society, religion as well as economy is also associated with land as one of the forms of nature. Bodos are predominantly the followers of animism unlike the other tribal communities. The Bodos traditionally practise 'Bathou' which is the belief in the five elements of nature and those are air, water, fire, sky and land. The term Bathou has been derived from two Bodo words 'Ba' which means 'Five' and 'Thou' which means 'Deep' (Brahma, 2015). Apart from the religious and cultural attachments of the community with land, the politico-historic relationship between land and the Bodos are worth mentioning. Bodos are regarded as the "Son of the Soil" as they were the first settler in the mighty Brahmaputra Valley.

Alike other communities Bodo also follow the patriarchal society with the tribal believes of inclination towards woman. Woman in Bodo community are treated as resourceful and valuable as man in the society. Despite of having a patriarchal society, Bodo woman plays a vital role in almost all the activities starting from the agriculture till property and land rights, but patriarchy and equality are the two different corners which cannot go hand in hand.

The Bodo community has a rich cultural heritage rooted in their close ties to nature, a distinct language, and vibrant social practices. While they have made significant strides in terms of political representation and cultural recognition, the challenges of modern development, social change, and political aspirations continue to shape their community. The Bodos continue to contribute to the rich diversity of Assam and India while preserving their unique identity amidst evolving socio-political landscapes.

### **3.6.1 Ethnic and Linguistic Identity**

The Bodos are part of the **Tibeto-Burman** linguistic group, which indicates their long historical presence in North Eastern India. The Bodo language, also known as **Boro** or **Boro-Garo**, is part of the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan

language family. It was recognized as one of the 22 scheduled languages of India under the Indian Constitution's Eighth Schedule.

Bodo language has a rich literary tradition, and it has undergone several changes in its script, initially being written in the Devanagari script. In recent years, Bodo literature has gained prominence, with writers contributing to poetry, fiction, and folk literature.

### **3.6.2 Social Structure**

The Bodo community traditionally followed a tribal system of governance, which was organized along clan lines. Each clan (or "Mech") had a headman or chief who would make decisions in consultation with the elders of the village. The traditional Bodo society is largely egalitarian, with important roles for both men and women. Although the community practices patriarchal norms, Bodo women have considerable freedom in matters like family decision-making, agriculture, and religious activities.

Historically, the Bodos were agrarian, with most families engaged in paddy farming, poultry, and fishing. Hunting and foraging were also important economic activities in the past. The community practises patriarchal system, in which male has the dominant role to play in family, village and community as a whole.

### **3.6.3 Cultural Practices**

The culture of the Bodo community is vibrant and deeply rooted in their agrarian way of life. Their traditions and customs reflect a harmonious relationship with nature, and many of their festivals are tied to the agricultural cycle.

**(A) Festivals: Bwisagu/Baisagu:** This is the Bodo New Year's festival, typically celebrated in mid-April. It is a harvest festival, and the community celebrates with music, dance, and feasting. People offer their prayers to the deities and spirits for good harvests and prosperity.

**Kherai Puja:** This is the most important religious ceremony of the Bodos, where they worship Bathou, the supreme god, who is symbolized by the Sijwu plant (*Euphorbia* genus). The ritual is performed by the village priest, and it involves offerings of rice beer, animals, and music to the deities. This festival is performed to seek blessings for the well-being of the community.

**(B) Dance and Music:** Dance and music are integral to Bodo culture. Bagurumba, a traditional Bodo dance, is performed during festivals and important events. It is known for its graceful and rhythmic movements, which are inspired by nature. The dancers often imitate birds and butterflies, symbolizing the community's close relationship with the environment. (Plate no. 3.6.3.B.30.) Traditional instruments like the Khawang (drum), Sifung (flute), and Serja (string instrument) are commonly used in performances. (Plate no. 3.6.3.B.31.)

**(C) Clothing:** The traditional attire of Bodo includes "Aronai" a scarf used to honour someone. Bodo men wear the "Gamsha", while Bodo women wear the "Dokhona", a wrap-around dress made of colourful fabric, usually woven by the women themselves. Women also wear a blouse or jacket along with the dokhona, and adorn themselves with jewellery, which includes necklaces, earrings, and bangles. (Plate no. 3.6.3.B.31.)

### **3.6.4 Religious Beliefs**

The traditional religion of the Bodos is Bathouism, which revolves around the worship of Bathou, the supreme deity, who is believed to be the creator and protector of the universe. Bathouism is based on animistic beliefs, with the Sijou plant

representing the divine. Offerings are made to Bathou during the Kherai Puja, and the religion is closely tied to nature worship.

Over time, many Bodos have adopted Hinduism and have incorporated Hindu gods and goddesses into their traditional belief system. However, Bathouism remains central to the Bodo identity. A small number of Bodos have also converted to Christianity in recent decades, particularly in areas with missionary influence.

### **3.6.5 Art and Craft**

The Bodos are known for their skill in weaving, and Bodo women are expert weavers. They produce intricate textiles, tools for daily life basically made of bamboo or sal tree logs. The community is also known for crafting items out of bamboo and cane, making household items, baskets, and musical instruments. (Plate no. 3.6.5.B.32.)

### **3.6.6 Social Reforms and Movements**

In recent decades, the Bodo community has been at the centre of socio-political movements in Assam. Since the 1960s, the Bodos have been demanding autonomy and recognition of their distinct ethnic identity, which led to several periods of unrest and negotiations with the Indian government. The demand for a separate Bodoland state has been a longstanding issue, and although they have not achieved full statehood, the establishment of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) in 2003 has given them a degree of autonomy in managing their affairs within the state of Assam.

Several Bodo political organizations have emerged over the years, such as the All-Bodo Students' Union (ABSU), which played a pivotal role in pushing for the recognition of the Bodo language and culture, as well as greater political rights.

## **Contemporary Issues**

Today, the Bodo community faces several challenges, including:

- **Economic underdevelopment:** Despite the fertile lands and agricultural background, many Bodo regions face challenges like lack of infrastructure, poor healthcare, and limited access to education.
- **Cultural assimilation and identity preservation:** With increasing contact with non-Bodo populations, particularly in urban areas, there is concern within the community about the preservation of their language, culture, and identity.
- **Political aspirations and conflict:** The demand for a separate Bodoland state remains a source of tension. While some political groups are satisfied with the current autonomous status, others continue to demand full statehood.

### **3.7 ROLE OF BODO WOMEN IN THE COMMUNITY**

In a society like India a woman's identity is often seen as a reproductive entity rather as an equal rightful and responsible part of society holding its share in all the developmental activities in a society. In Indian context, the woman and land right issue has been encountered during the land reform programme in India after independence. Kerala and West Bengal were the first two states of the country to have an action regarding the property and land rights amongst the women.

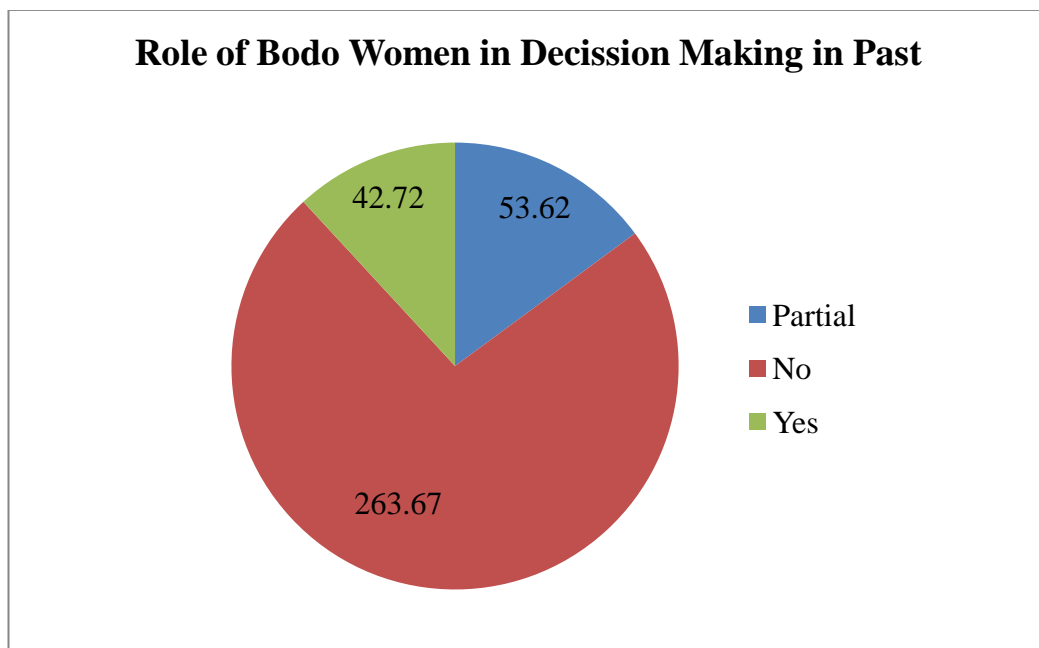
The role of women in a Bodo community is very diverse and co-operative in terms of handling the household chores. Women in the community have been actively participating in running the family since the past. Despite of lacking facilities to acquire education, the Bodo women were engaged in contributing economic stability. Women were engaged in activities such as weaving, trading the home-grown agricultural products, homemade kitchen items including local rice beer, etc. through those activities out of their inherent skills as legacy, they were not only supporting the family, but also establishing an identity for themselves.

Apart from economy, even during the past days Bodo women were also actively participating and supporting the community in terms of political unrest situation. The role played by several Bodo women fighter against the administration for availing facilities and identity in return of their lives and sanctity is worth mentioning.

Bodo women's role is praised not just in social, economic and political context in the past, but in the present too due to the dynamic roles played in those spheres is highly appreciated. Their share of contribution in the growth of the community is very crucial for overall balanced development in the society.

Though the roles played by the Bodo women are highly praised in the community. Still in terms of decision making the role played by the women fades off. The following two pie charts were prepared from the field survey data collected shows the role played by the omen in terms of decision making in the past and in the present-day scenario. Although with due course of time the share of involvement of Bodo women in decision making has risen giving them some dynamic positions to hold in the family as well as in the community.

Figure no. 3.7.1: Pie chart showing role of Bodo Women in decision making in past.



Source: Field survey of the study area.

The above pie graph has been prepared out of the total responses from the study area. The pie here shows the role of Bodo women in terms of decision making in the past. Traditionally the decisions are majorly taken by the man folks of the family or village or community. As the Bodo community is a patriarchy practising community, the sole works of pride are basically done by men. So, the decision of any discussion was taken by the men of the family. Although the partial consent of women was taken especially in the cases where female related issues or concerns were the topic of discussion. Though the partial consent was taken by the women still the final and ultimate decision was always taken by the men especially the head of the family.

Here as per the data, it reflects the same notion and practice of patriarchy in the Bodo community in terms of decision making. The degrees of negative responses are more with 263.67° in terms of women having any role in decision making. This huge share of negative response clearly highlights that woman did not have any role in terms of decision making. The responsible reasons are lack of education among both men and women in the community, lack of awareness, consideration of women as lay member of the family, consideration of women as weak or gets easily emotional and rather things less rationally. These were some of the reasons behind women were not considered to be fit enough to take part in decision making. Although the share of partial consent is slightly higher than the full consent given by women in decision making. This means that, during the traditional times the women were simply taken partial consent on any topic of concern. The topic here includes related to household works, related to religious practise and any topic associated with the women or girl of the family or village or community in general.

Apart from that in no other issues the women are associated to take the final decision. Only in a few instances, the full consent or full decision is taken by women. Such instances were very less because in each of the Bodo village the rules and regulations differ from each other. There is the rules that have been set by the prior head of the village known as Gaon Bura or the member of the panchayat were practised without any flexibility. Thus, the role of women was the least in terms of

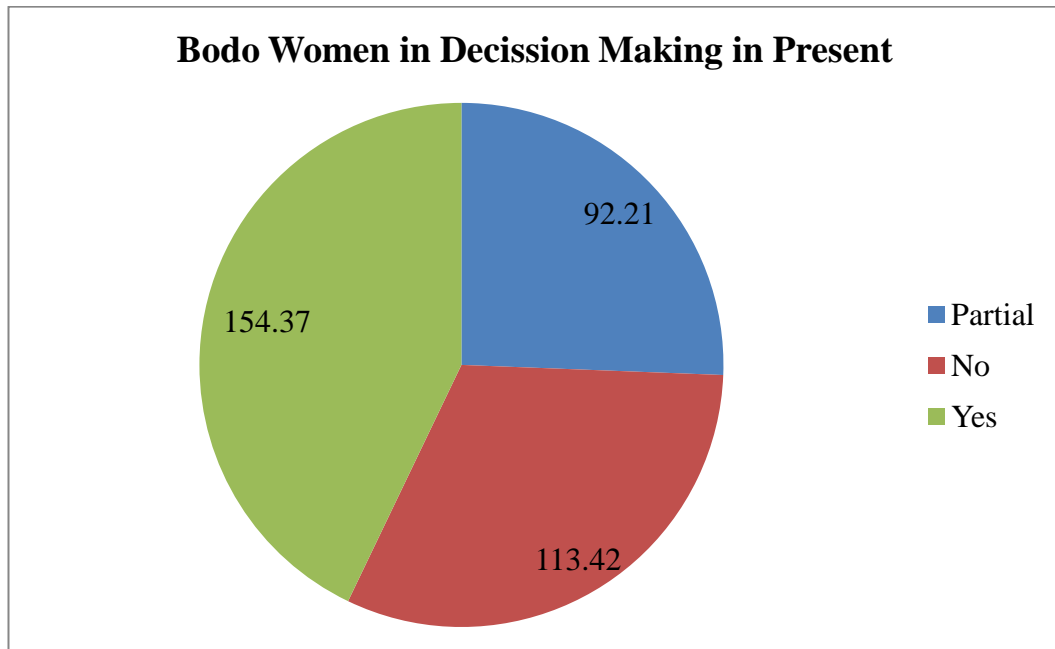
taking any decisions in terms of village level. In terms of family level, here the head of the family known as Afa or father is the ultimate decision maker. In the absence of the father of the family, the elder bothers known as Ada, younger brother known as Phongbai, paternal elder uncles known as Aiyong, paternal younger uncles Adwi plays the role of head of the family while taking any decision. Here the mother of the family known as Aiwi has the only role to give her consent and rest must abide by the rules and decision taken by the male member of the family.

*According to an anonymous old women respondent aging of 86 years from Khairabari, Udalguri district- 'Houaa mahari phwra je khwo nw thik bunga manw, benw jathwng swi. Beyao hai jwng henjao phwra bung nanwi jebw rojo jaya balai'. It means- whatever the male sects have decided we women have nothing to say than to abide by. Moreover, what is the use of giving consent, if it is not even going to be considered anyway?*

Moreover, with due course of time several reforms have been made in the systems of the villages as well as in the family to be more flexible towards women. Because of the involvement of new women in the decision making certainly the process and the outcome has become smoother and trustworthy for both the male and female member of the community.

The following pie graph shows the transition from the past to the present role of women in terms of decision making. This transition has not only given the right to the women to convey their speech but also has reduced the burden of the male member of the family or village or community in general.

Figure no. 3.7.2: Pie chart showing role of Bodo Women in decision making in the present.



Source: Field survey of the study area.

The above pie diagram shows the role of women in decision making in the present-day context. There it is clearly seen the transition in the degree of share of women giving their consent in decision making is the highest with 154.37°. It is a good sign though to make increase in the number of positive responses in terms of women playing a vital role in decision making in the family or village or community. This transition is an outcome of understanding the value of women over the male dominance. The very reason behind the positive outcome is through having more access to education for both men and women, exposure to the influence of internet and global world, influence from the other community both in good and bad way, etc. This change has no doubt given the women a platform to express their words and thoughts to her family and village members in terms of the freedom that a human being deserves.

Apart from the positive sense the share of negative responses in terms of women playing a role in decision making is still high with 113.42°. This huge share of negative response is still a reason of downfall and unrest among the two genders of the community. Despite of the developmental activities for the up gradation of people and their way of thinking among the community, the share of people who still believes that women cannot take any decision still exists. However, the share of responses who thinks partial consent is taken from the women has comparatively increased in the present day. Although it is not a very good sign to have only partial consent of women in the long run for the development of the community.

Women are currently making herself capable enough to stand together with men and take a decision either for own or the country. Thus, the role of Bodo women should also be strong enough to not just run a household but to step ahead for the development of the community as well with all the calibre and abilities that the Bodo women possess. Through giving her the access to take decisions, the Bodo women can better decide her position in the family or village or community in general. By giving her the opportunity the community will have sense of equality and equal development despite of the Bodo community having a patriarchal system of practise. Plate no. (3.7.35.)

### **3.8. BODO WOMEN AND THE LAND RIGHTS**

In the Bodo culture, woman in their parental house also has their equal share and importance in terms of property distribution and land ownership. Daughter or daughters in a Bodo family gets their share of ancestral property according to their ranking in terms of age, eligibility, parental dearness, affection and love. Unlike the other communities, under the Hindu law act of land and property even among the Bodos, it is completely based on the parents to whom the land and property share will be given and on what basis or consequences. In the earlier days the situations around the distribution of land and property were mostly confined till the sons of the

family and not the daughters. But it is also not necessary that the case and the situation will always be the same in every household in the community.

The relationship between woman and land continues to be the same after the marriage as well. The woman will have her share of land given from the parental house even after marriage. The in-laws do not have the right to transfer the land ownership in their names without her consent or will. The land share given to the male from his parental house also has the possibility of the woman or else to their wards to get the ownership after her husband gets expired. The widowed woman has the full right to have the land as well as other property ownership after her husband if they have any wards of their own or else if she gives a consent to live alone till her death in her husband's house. The ownership of land and property gets transferred to the woman or else to their wards if she is a widowed single mother, and this tradition has been followed since the early days till date.

In-laws and other family members also do have the right to not to give away the property and land to the single widowed woman if her conduct and behaviour is found not to be suitable for the family. It is only if the single widowed woman gives a full consent of her behaviour and nature with the family, the property and land will be transferred to her name. The same tradition is also followed in the present day as well but if the woman is employed and already has her own property the case will be again different according to the Hindu Law. These Hindu laws as well as the existing Tribal Bodo laws does not provide any rights in real sense but more of a surrogate depending upon the situation and relationship within the family members

The cases that revolve in such a situation in other tribal community will be having different dimensions and viewpoint from the different perspectives that may not be similar to the Bodos despite of being a tribal community. The Bodo land system and property ownership is not away from the Hindu Law as the Bodos are mainly the followers of Hinduism. Though the share of Christianity among the Bodos is also present in the society but the larger share and notion of laws has been taken by the Hindu Law.

The issues of land right and land ownership are of great interest in the present-day context round the world. Several feminist activities are actively demonstrating to the fact that if woman is to be considered as equal, rather than subordinate.

### **3.8.1. Traditional Property Inheritance System Among the Bodo**

The history of the Bodo woman and their extent of rights were confined only till her own life and periphery. The daughters had no such share in the parental property in the earlier days. The responsible reason could be the large family size and less land to share among the sons. Therefore, the daughters have always been left out because they were considered as the other's property dweller.

The Bodos mostly follow the Hindu Law of land system in which the girl does not have the right to have a share in their parental property unlike other communities. The case of a married woman in the Bodo community is almost the same to that of the other communities. If the woman is a mother and her husband expires suddenly then the share of the husband's property will be transferred to either the widowed woman or else to their wards with full consent of the in-laws. But if the widowed woman is single and doesn't have child then the complete decision will be based on the in-laws if to give the share of the property or not and that consent will be based on the behaviour and suitability of the woman with the family and her will as well. It is not always necessary the same solution will be implied in every case in such, because at that time there was no proper concrete solution to such cases in the community level and it is mainly handled in the family itself.

### **3.8.2 Women's Extent to Property and Land Right in the Community**

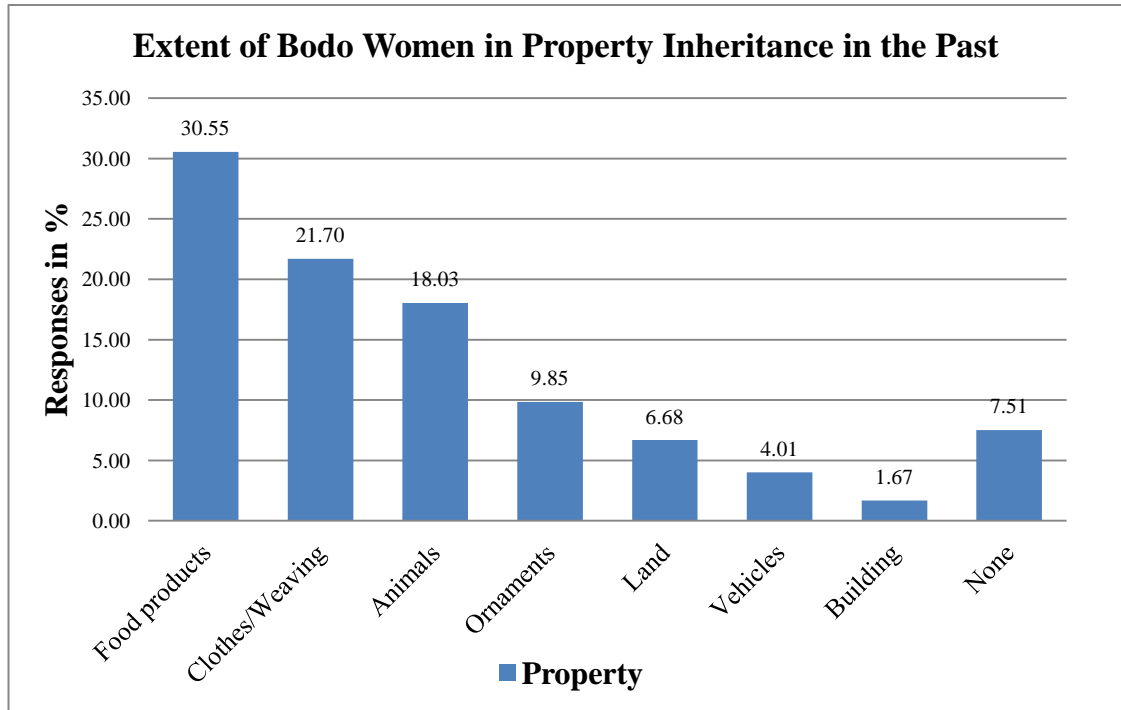
Whenever the concerned topic of woman and land has been discussed, only the scenario that one can imagine and has been always considered and highlighted is of the central India and the rest has always been ignored to focus into. India is diverse so as its diverse in the social structure and construction that vary from place to place and region to region. The issue around the woman and land in one region

differs from the other region. These differences are mainly due to the resource availability based on which the social, cultural, economic, and political as well as the religious structure is fully depended and constructed. The North-Eastern region of India is mainly accompanied by the different tribal communities and groups as well as sub-groups.

Tribal region and the communities have a different notion of resource availability and utilisation. Despite of having the patriarchy amongst the tribes' gender discriminations is perhaps comparatively less. Both the gender has the equal share of work and responsibility in their own way based on their respective speciality. Tribal societies are also like other societies in which the geographic location and climatic condition plays a vital role in constructing and moulding the society. But one is also not ignorant of the fact that, despite of the claims of having gender equality in the tribal societies, the question always arises of its existence and functioning in reality.

In terms of Bodo community, women have a specific respect and position in the family as well as community. Alike other tribal communities of North East India the extent of Bodo women in terms of property and land inheritance seems to be limited. The Bodo women have never demanded of their property rights. The women folk in the community have accepted whatever property has been provided to her by the parents as well as in-laws. However, in the following analysis of various charts the property and land rights inheritance of Bodo women has been elaborately discussed. (fig no. 3.8.2.1) and (fig no. 3.8.4.1.).

Figure No. 3.8.2.1: Bar graph showing the extent of Bodo women in traditional property inheritance.



Source: Field Survey of the study area.

The above graph basically shows the responses of the women from the study area in terms of Bodo women extend to property inheritance in the community in the past. Bodo being a tribal community, its main intension is to be self-sufficient to be able to run the family during unsuitable condition. The community used to concentrate more in the context of attaining basic things for livelihood such as food, shelter and clothing, thus, from the above bar diagram, the trend of women being given the food products counts the highest followed by weaving tools, animal items and products such as ornaments, vehicles, land etc. The shares of food items, weaving tools and clothes as well as animals were more because the community wanted the females to be able to run the family during crisis. Moreover, the percentage of these products as considered as property for women reduced gradually with time. Such a decrease is due to the influence from other community and requirements for the fulfilment of current period. The graph also talks about the 1.6% of the share of building given away to the daughter and daughter in law without legal

documents. As a tribal community legal documents were not given importance in front of the promises made by the head of the family. A small share of land or part of building or houses could have been carried by the daughters and daughter in-laws.

### **3.8.3. Present Practise of Property Inheritance System**

In the present-day context, the scenario is still somewhat the same but now almost all the agreements are done based on the legal documents and consent of the judicial law and code of conduct of the court. The share of the daughters has now been equally given as the sons. The women are now having the equal rights to have the parental property as well as land ownership totally based on her will and consent. She has the right to both accept and reject the share given to her through the code of conduct in a legal way. The case in terms of the married woman is almost the same with that of the earlier days. The widowed woman gets the share of her husband after the expiry. However, if the woman is a mother, then the system of land and property transfer is easier (natural, especially when there is a child in the family) to implement than that of the single widowed woman. The only difference is that in the present day, the women has the right to express her views and ideas and take the help of the legal advisory in terms of any injustice done with proper documentation and law.

In terms of woman and land rights and ownership in the Bodo community, patriarchy determines the whole issue in relation to land rights and its related resources. On a closer look the patriarchal system and Hindu law go side by side influencing the Bodos' social set up ultimately determining the position of Bodo women and their land rights too. The entire system of land rights and the property ownership among the Bodo community has not been through proper study in details because all this land systems are directly or indirectly associated with the power relations. Among Bodos the property share, ownership and distribution system has been based on the consent of both the genders as well as the families with proper discussion and suggestions of the elderly persons of the society in a village or locality. Thus, the issue of land right or the cries of the woman almost remain silent and might be sometimes unheard by the society because of the power relations.

#### **3.8.4. Present practices of Women's Extent to Property and Land Right**

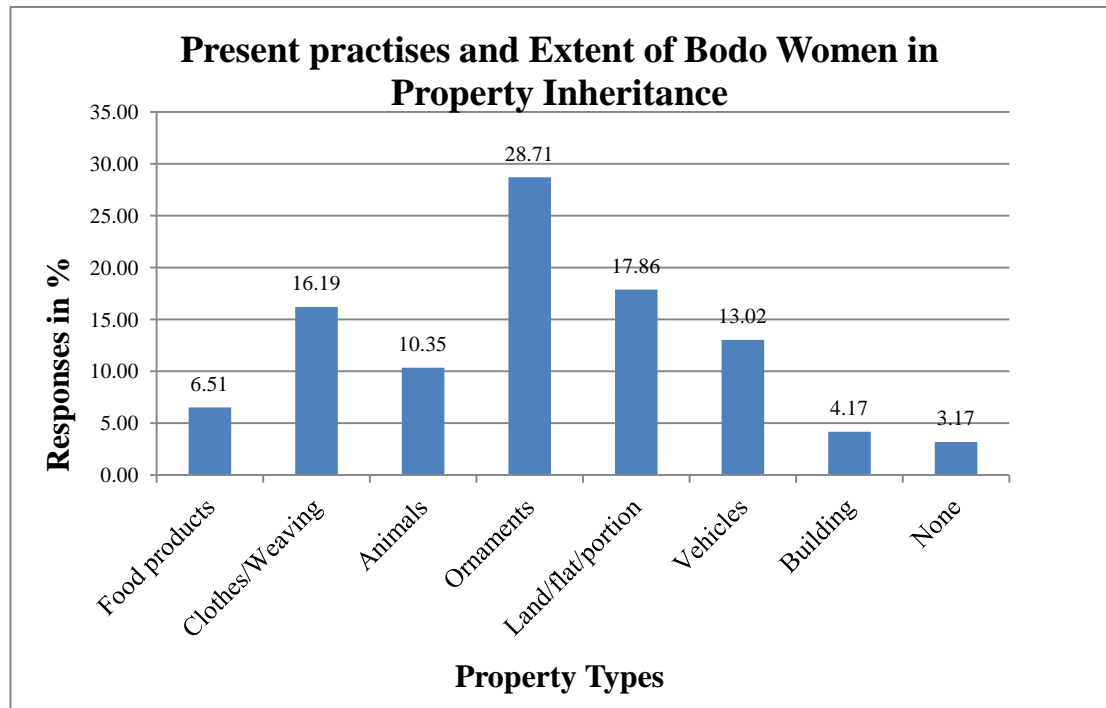
In the present-day women in the community has created a subsequent space for herself. There is a significant change in the inheritance system of property among the women. Earlier the female was given only the products especially food or agricultural products and weaving items or clothes. That has been shown in the previous graph and has been interpreted.

Currently in the urban areas basically in the towns, women are not exactly getting the land rights due to high price of land. But they were given verbally a portion of the house or flat in the building in the parental house. This sharing is again based on the behaviour of the women in the family. That part of consideration of property to a woman is still following the traditional norms.

On the other hand, in the in-law's place, there is no such change has been observed. Women can claim upon the husband's share. Although, it will base on the in-laws especially the male members, if the claim can be fulfilled or not. The perimeters or factors behind the acceptance will highly focus if the women are established and self-sufficient or not. Now a day's women are directly and indirectly are earning for their basic needs. In such a case especially in the towns women can claim from the husband's share and very often as she is educationally sound and stronger to defend their claim.

Whereas, in the villages women are not often engaged in any establish institutions. They are simply self-engaged to support the household. In such a case, the women cannot defend the judgement given by the other members of the family. Basically, here too it is completely based on the behaviour of the women if they can be given land and other precious property right.

Figure no. 3.8.4.1: Bar graph showing the present practices and extent of Bodo women in property inheritance.



Source: Field Survey of the study area.

The above graph shows the extent and change in the property inheritance of women in the present day. There is a significant change and decrease in the percentage of food items, weaving tools and clothes, animals. Whereas, on the other hand, there is a gradual increase in the percentage share of vehicles, land/flat/portion of land or flat and lastly ornaments. This shift from non-materialistic to materialistic good is due to the requirement and nature of investment of those goods for future and influence from other community as well. Whereas the sufficient number of responses still agrees that women are given the weaving tools and clothes as property. The possible reason could be the skills the Bodo women have received through their descending as legacies which they still practise.

It is interesting to note that the percentage share of given away building or part of house to the daughters and daughter in laws has increased in the present by 4.17%. This increase could be because of improved education system in the study area. The other reason could be because the female is becoming capable to inherit the traditional land and part of houses, at least till the presence of the head of the family.

### **3.9. CHANGES IN THE PROPERTY INHERITANCE AMONG THE BODO**

Apart from that, among the Bodos the issue of woman-land and property has never been the prime focus of discussion just like the other communities. The responsible reasons might be the silence of the women, unawareness of the ownership systems; proper settlement and judgement given by the elders are always given the priority and acceptance of the judgement with full consent and agreement, etc. The other reason could be the unawareness of the women's movement round the world towards their rights in terms of liberty, freedom of expression, land and property ownership etc. The geographic and political unrest in the location of the Bodo concentration can also be the reason due to which such issues of woman and land systems are never given the lame light to discuss in the frame.

Bodo belongs to a warrior community since the beginning. From the earlier days itself the only concentration was to fight for living and resources in one way or the other. The only aim of the warrior was to safeguard and protect themselves from the enemies. In between that, neither during that time they had space to think about such issues around woman and land nor now. Even in the present-day context, the community is fighting for their own existence and identity with the state as well as the central government. In this conflict, the issues of women are left out untouched and unnoticed. Another possible factor could also be that the community is not finding the necessity to have discussion or concern about the case so far. The issues of women and land right is present in every community, only the share and the proportion of existence vary from each other. In Bodo community, the importance has not been yet given to the issues around woman-land and property because so far, all these issues are being handled in a family level only. These issues are being consulted and solved within the consent of the concerned person and not in the community level.

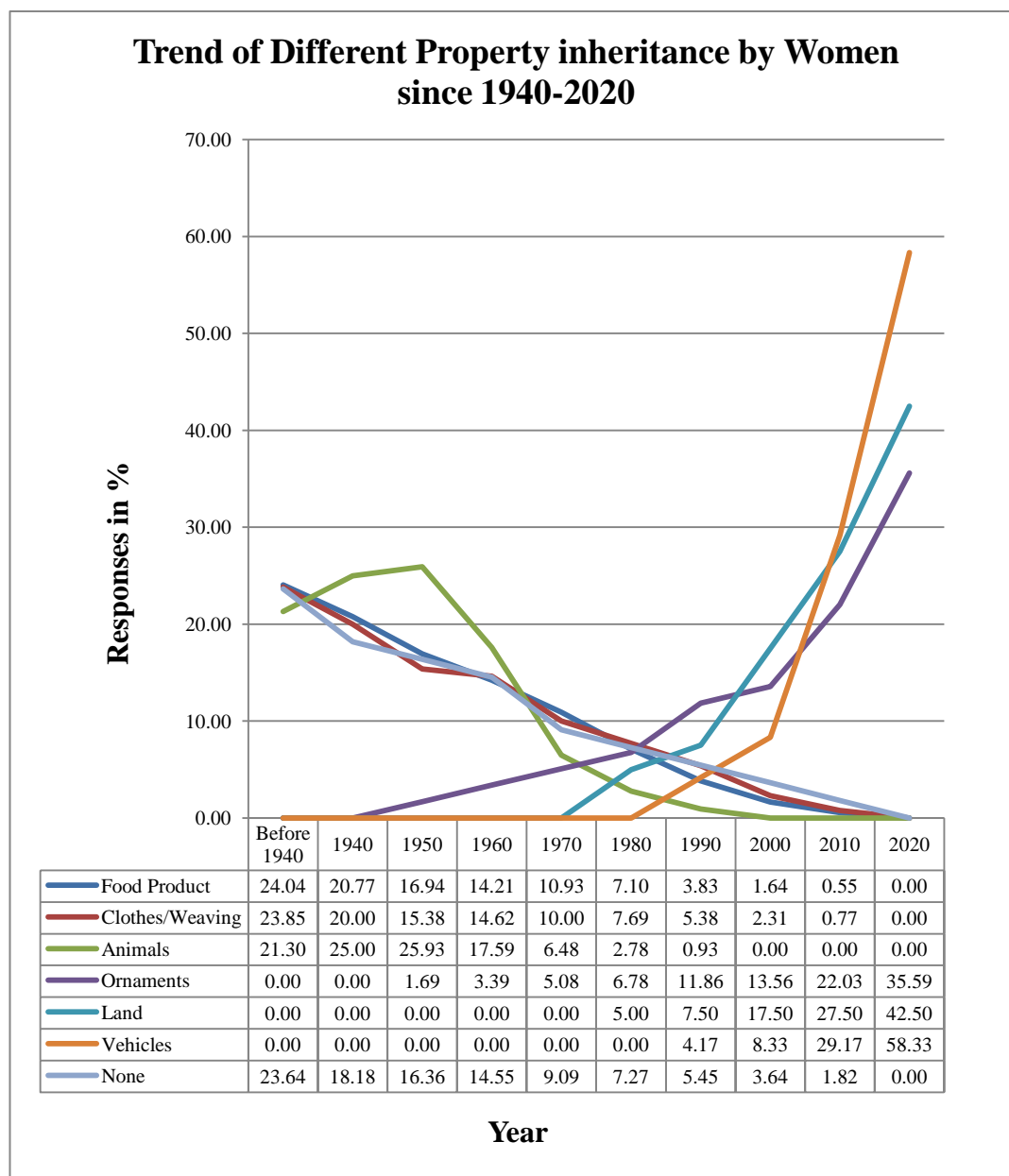
Thus, each case is handled and solved completely considering the situation and the consequences and has no proper or concrete law to implement in every case. For this reason, proper research is very much needed to have a better and clear idea about the land holdings and ownership systems. After consideration of all the factors

and situations of both man and woman including the societal structure, a proper solution and judgment should be made. So, that no injustice is done based on gender in the society and the resource distribution among the people doesn't take a curve of gender biasness in the way of development before it becomes an unavoidable societal issue among the equal halves of the Bodo community.

However, in terms of having changes, there have been major changes in the property inheritance since the past. Those changes are related to items given to the women. Earlier the concept was more about sustenance, but in the present time it is more about value of the product and accessibility to handle. Still with having these changes in goods, the change in terms of land ownership seems to emerge in the community in a very less percentage. The change in property and land ownership has been discussed in the following graphs based on the responses collected from the field survey.

The following line graph shows the trend of property extend of Bodo women. The line graph has been prepared from the women responses from the field survey. Here the female responses have been given more emphasis. Since 1940 to 1970 the food products, clothes or weaving tools and animals were the only property given to women. It was because of lack of resource availability, lack of requirement and interest of women they were limited to these items. On the other hand, looking into the context of property rights the women were considered as incapable of handling the land related issues. Thus, they were not given the land rights. Since 1980 to 2020 the trend is drastically changing and is still changing in terms of property ownership among women. The percentage of is increasing in the properties such as ornaments, vehicles, land or portion of flat and on the other hand, there is a decrease in the percentage of food products, animal, weaving items.

Figure no. 3.9.1: Line graph showing the trend of change in different property inheritance by Bodo women since 1940 till 2020



Source: Field survey of the study area.

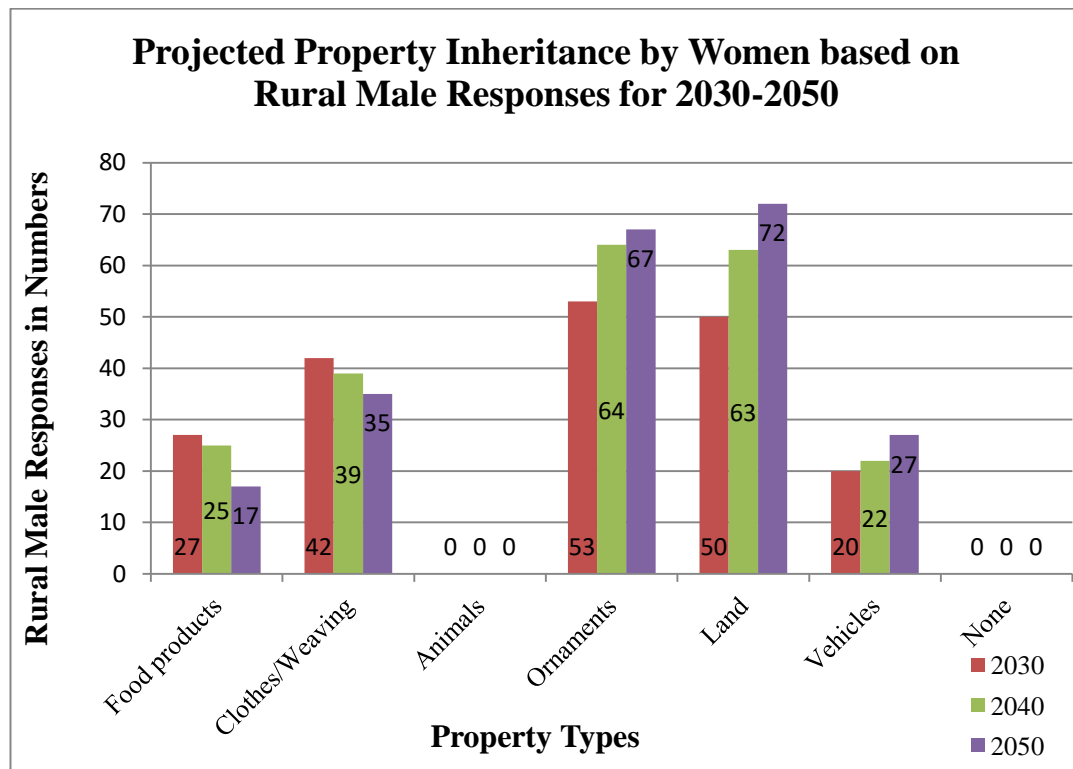
This change is due to the ideas of investment in property learned from other surrounding communities. This influence of investing in non-perishable and valuable items has given a new dimension to the property inheritance system among the women. Now the women are also becoming more confident in dealing with the

situations instead of depending on male members of the family. These changes in the trend are predominant in the urban areas more than the villages.

The major portion of the period during 1940 till 1970 the women were confined to certain limitations. Here the responsible reason could be the education. Due to the lack of education among the people of community the transformation took a little more time than expected. The education is affected badly is due to the political unrest condition in the area during that period. The freedom fights of the community against the arm forces to attain a free state for Bodo population, has impacted largely in the quality of education both for men and women in the entire community.

After 1980's till 2000 the trend of property inheritance has changed. Here the improved level of education has played a vital role. But the major reason behind the shift is because of the 1993 and 2003 Bodo Peace Accord that been signed with government. This accord was accompanied by several incidents, unrest situation, eviction and massacres leading to loss of property and lives. People were bound to flee from their native places leaving all their belongings behind. This has changed the thinking process of considering the items which are easy to carry are more valuable such as ornaments, vehicles and land documents. That is the main reason that the trend of property inheritance such as ornament, vehicles, and land are increasing after 2000 till the current date. It has helped in settling the political unrest situation in the community to a certain extend. Education has increased the chances of changes in the traditional practices and providing the scope to avail land right among the Bodo women based on her qualities instead of her behaviours.

Figure no. 3.9.2: Bar graph showing the Projected Property Inheritance by Women based on Rural Male Responses for 2030-2050



Source: Field survey of the study area.

The above bar graph has been prepared from the data collected during the survey. Based on the responses given by male population in the rural areas the projection of property inheritance by Bodo women in general has been looked upon. Intentionally the responses have been kept in numbers instead of converting it in percentage to analyse and understand the ground level projected practise of property inheritance in the study area.

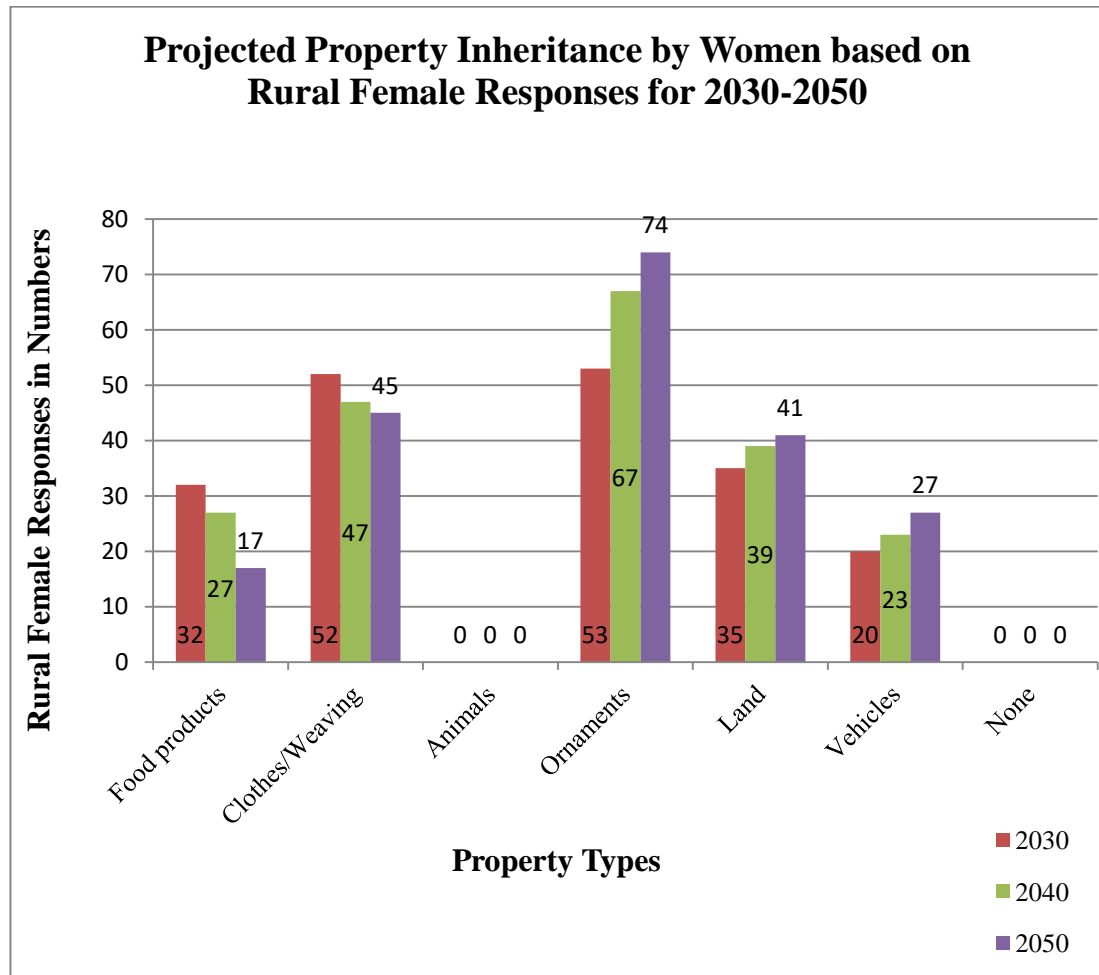
The graph shows that the rural Bodo men are giving positive responses in terms of giving more valuable property such as ornaments, vehicles and land as such in days to come. The graph shows a downfall in the property inheritance in terms of food products, clothes/weaving items from 2030 to 2040 and to 2050. This shift is a sign of prosperity and sense of equal share of property among both men and women in the community. It is further interesting to note the upward positive graph of

property inheritance in terms of more expensive or valuable items from 2030 to 2040 and 2050. According to the responses during the survey, this shift from traditional property inheritance to the modern property inheritance is an outcome of the change in the women's overall development.

The development here meant in terms of educational qualification, emotional and social strength and economic and political stability through several women based Self Help Groups and various Governmental developmental schemes that have been launched for women. The other reason behind such shift in property inheritance is because of the families having less children or only one girl child. This reason is enough for a family to completely dedicate the wealth of the family upon the only girl child as a form of investment or as a source of reliability for future days to come as an old parent. Other reason behind the shift is because of the gild or women being more responsible towards their duties in a family in terms of loyalty. It is not a case that boy child or male members are less responsible or less loyal towards family. It is just the instances and events of male member being drained out of liquor culture in the community and engagements in anti-social groups leading to mismanagement of family and property.

Thus, these were some of the reasons given by the male respondents during the survey in relation to the shift of traditional property inheritance of women in the community. The responses carry a sense of trust, dependence and equality among male and female member of the community. These will provide an opportunity to the women of the Bodo community to uplift herself and carry her responsibilities based on her calibre without being questioned or doubted on her capabilities and existence particularly in the Bodo community.

Figure no. 3.9.3: Bar graph showing the Projected Property Inheritance by Women based on Rural Female Responses for 2030-2050



Source: Field survey of the study area.

The above bar graph is prepared out of the survey data collected in the study area. Here the responses of the rural female in numbers have been recorded. The graph is showing the downfall of considering food products and clothing items as property to be inherited by women in the community during the projected year of 2030, 2040 and 2050. The responses have been intentionally recorded in numbers to easily compare with the male responses on the same projection of property inheritance. Apart from the downfall, there is a complete zero response in terms of animal and no category of considering it as property, which was present in the traditional property inheritance system of Bodo community.

Along with that there is a gradual increase in the positive responses in terms of ornaments, land and particularly vehicles. Here the maximum responses are increasing in terms of ornaments more than land for the projected period from 2030-2050. The reason behind such spike is because women are more into ornaments than land. They consider themselves to be more comfortable to have ornaments as their property. They are reluctant to accept their capabilities of holding a land of their own. Such a deemed attitude is nothing but the reflection of the past experiences they faced. It won't be wrong to even say that women have taken the fact of not attaining land rights as for granted despite of their capacities and capabilities to responsibly carry land as their identity. Apart from that the other reason of not considering land as a property to be inherit by them was that they were comparing their present and future with their past.

*According to a Female respondent in Bodo language:*

*(i) “Jwng gwdw ni phrai nw Haa mwnnai nubwaa khwi, dabw lai mohai Haa mwnnw”? It means- In the past as well women have never inherited land, how can we expect to have one now?*

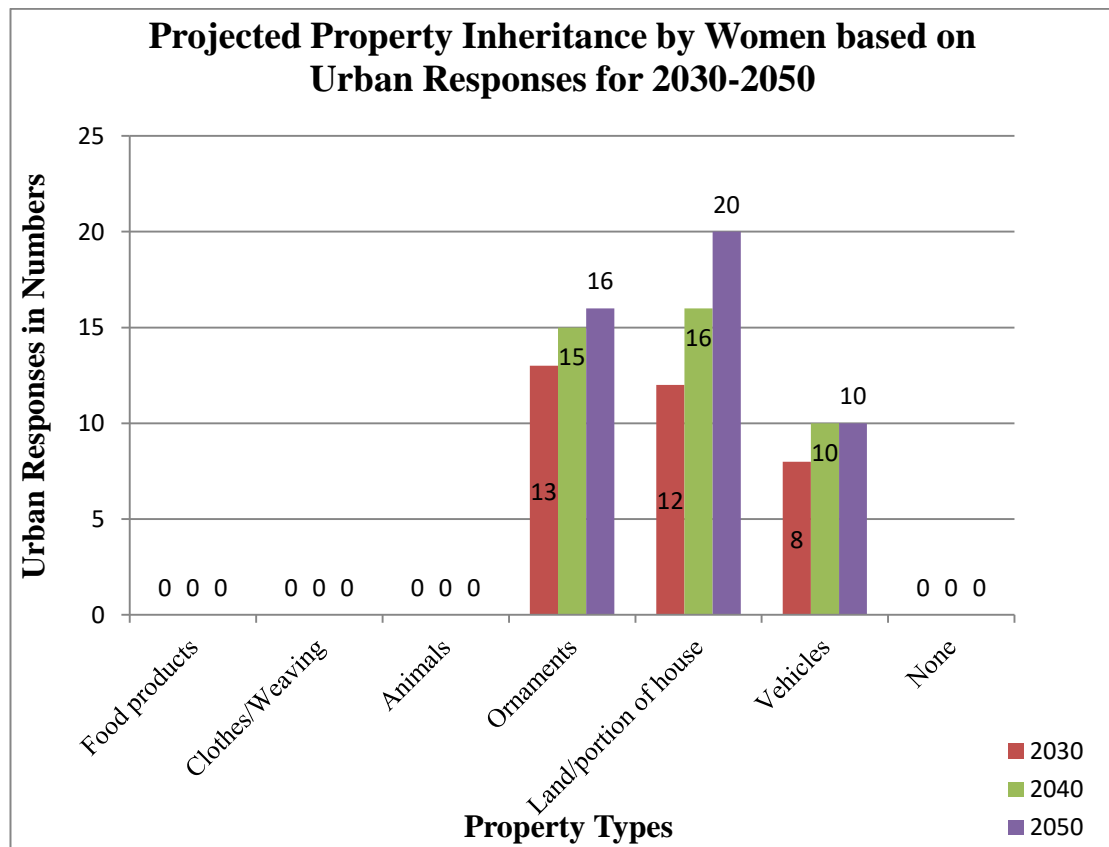
*(ii) “Khaipha phwr phisai thwijananwi gotho gothai thaseyaobw honwi Bima, Bibwi, Bibo, Bimanwi, Bimadwi mwnhanw Haa khwo nw hwjaya swi phisai ni bhaag khwo, jwnglai mohai Haa mwnnw”? It means- Those Mothers, Grand Mothers, Sisters, Aunts (paternal, maternal) who are widowed and left with kids are not even given the plot of her husband's land by the In-laws, how can we think of getting a land?*

*(iii) “Jwng henjao phwrnw manw Haa nanggwo? Haba ni sigang phipha nao thanw mwngwn arw haba ni unao phisai nao thanw mwngkhagwn khwo lai”. It means- We being women, before marriage we get to live in parent's house and after marriage we get to live in husband's house anyway, why do we need separate land for ourselves?*

(iv) *“Jwng bima phwra nw mwna khwi Haa, nwnswr sikhla phwra bw mwnnw da lugwi”*. It means- *We being mothers have never got the land rights, you being a young girl don’t keep a hope to get land.*

These were some of the negative responses from the rural areas given by the women in regard to claiming land rights. Here the negative responses came up more thinking of the past and considering themselves to be incapable of carrying the responsibility of land right or land as their identity. Thus, the saying of Bina Agarwal in her works, ‘Kabhi kabhi ek aurat hi, dusri aurat ki dushman hain’. It means- At times, a woman acts as an enemy to another woman.

Figure no. 3.9.4: Bar graph showing the Projected Property Inheritance by Women based on Urban Responses for 2030-2050



Source: Field survey of the study area.

The above bar graph shows the responses of urban male and female of the study area. From the data collected, the graph has been prepared to see the responses in relation to the projected property inheritance of Bodo women for the year period from 2030-2050. Here the graph clearly shows that in the urban area's food products, clothes/ weaving items and animals are not even being considered as property. The reason behind is that in the town areas people hardly have plots to build houses to live in. They rarely have plots to do agriculture and weaving. That is why, those items received zero responses.

Apart from that the properties such as ornaments, vehicles and most importantly land/portion/part of house got positive responses in the urban area. The practicality behind such response is such as now women are working by themselves are they run the family at times single handed. Thus, they are equipped with economic stability to buy ornaments as well as land and skilled with driving skills to drive a vehicle. Such a positive response is the outcome of better education and sense of handling the family by both male and female member of the household. In the urban areas the concept of land owning by a female has been accepted. Such acceptance is the outcome of the modern mindset and influence of the western culture. In the urban areas as the land or plots are expensive to have huge in quantity.

Thus, the concept of sharing the same house or giving way one flat or floor to the daughter is most common. Such sharing is completely based on the behaviour of the daughter of the family and the consent lies upon the father or parents in together. Provided the fact, legal documentation in such case lacks in practise, the share is completely or partially given verbally by the head of the household. In the graph it is seen that in the projected years the land holding by the women will be more according to the responses from the field survey.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL IMPACTS OF** **WOMEN-LAND RIGHTS**

Bodo have a patriarchal society in practise in which sons, brothers, husband, uncles, grandsons, always had a major role to play. The role can be in both personal or professional as well as family level, society and community level. Whenever, the context of owning any property the community has a liberal opinion. The women have their place to share their opinion and suggestions. The dilemma here arises when that freedom of sharing opinion comes with a pre-planned frame of restrictions. The opportunity given to women to share their views is so haphazardly constructed that women's view remains in a limited space.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, that as Bodo being a society the inheritance of parental land is distributed among the male members. Similarly, when the women are married off, the husband's property likely has the tendency to go to the son(s). In case, head of the family expires without distributing the property among the wards, then the son(s) of family will decide on the basis of hierarchy about the shares.

*“Distribution of land among the women in the community is not a traditional practise. Women were only given the products mainly the (asthaibor)tangible products and not (sthaibor)intangible products or the source of the products.” Source- field survey -by an anonymous respondent, Gossaigaon, Kokrajhar, Assam.*

The distribution of land among women seems to be very manageable. Although there are several factors hidden in terms of getting land ownership for a woman. To avail both parental or in-laws land, Bodo women has to justify their calibre in various factors. Factors such as social, economic and political which has a great influence.

#### **4.1. SOCIAL FACTOR INFLUENCING THE WOMEN AND LAND RIGHTS**

Within the social factors several grounds have been taken into consideration such as cultural practises, religious believes societal activities and status, traditional activities and norms, education. Here, the analysis has been made based on the field survey and data collected from various villages and towns of the four districts of B.T.A.D.

##### **4.1.1. Culture**

Culturally Bodo community has similar kind of cultural practises in relation to the other tribal communities of Assam and other Northeastern states of India. Despite of having similarities, within the community itself there is a difference in practises district wise or locality wise. These differences are basically due to the influence from other surrounding communities. The location of the study area is as such where the entire Northern part is sharing an international border with Bhutan. This international border has its influence in the cultural practises due to the resource availability in the foothills area. Apart from the Northern part being internationally bordered, a major part of it is also surrounded with forest. The land holding in the forest area is not permissible as per the Forest Department of Assam. Although there were several forest village referred as Reserved or Forest Villages. Those forest villages are not only occupied by Bodo community, but other communities such as Rabha, Garo, Rajbongshi, Santhali, and Nepali. In such a diverse area with limited resources the maximum chances of intermixing of culture is very widely observed.

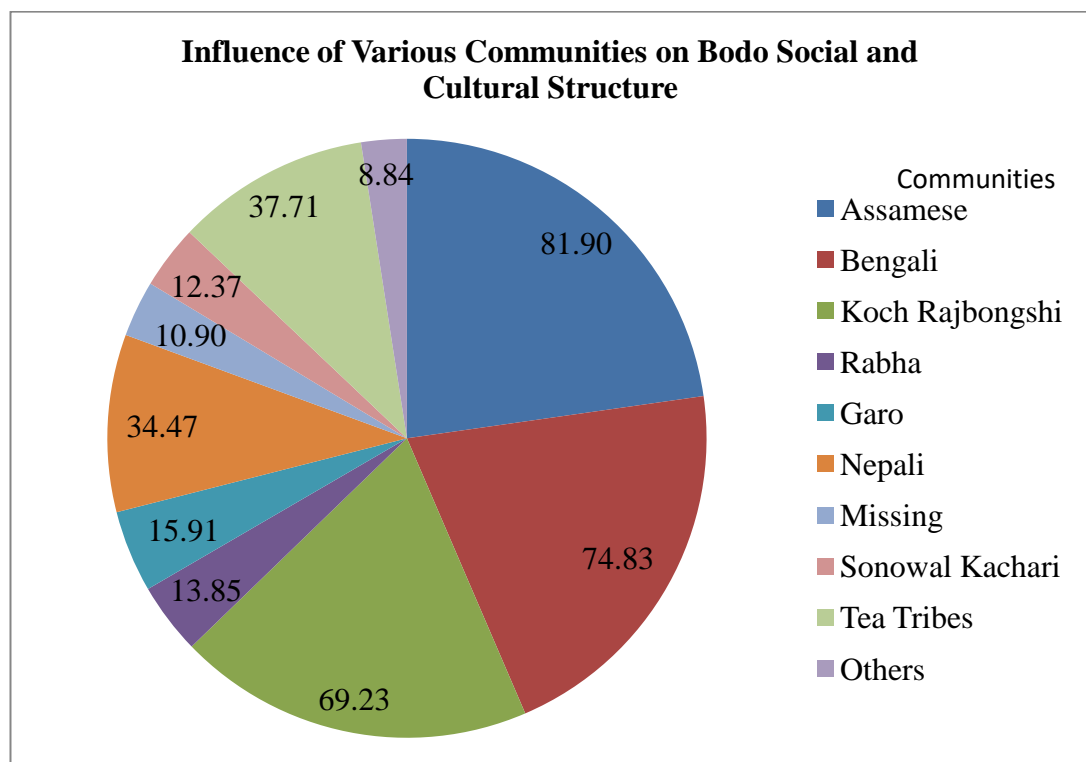
The Western and Southeastern part of the study area is also comprised of forest reserves and have many forest villages. Apart from the forest villages and their vulnerable living sources, the cultural diversity in the area is mainly responsible for other non-tribal communities and religion. Communities like Bengali, Rajbongshi, Nath, Garo, Rabha Orang, and Santhali are dominant.

The Bodo of central and the Eastern part of the study area practices more nontraditional cultural activities. This is again due to the influence of other non-tribal

communities such as Assamese, Bengali, Rajbongshi in majority. This influence is due to the sharing of district boundaries with the adjacent nontribal districts of Assam.

Due to such a diverse intermixing of cultures the traditional practise of land holding also get influenced. Especially, the villages which are nearby the Garo communities, they generally practise the share of land holding among women as well. Whereas, on the other hand where the community is surrounded by core tribal communities, they do not entertain the sharing of land among the females.

Figure no. 4.1.1.1: Pie chart showing the influence of various communities on Bodo Social and Cultural Structure of the study area.



Source: Field survey of the study area.

The above pie diagram shows the influence of various communities upon the social and cultural practises of Bodo community. The study of this analysis is important because it will show the influence in both positive and negative manner.

It's influence especially in terms of women and property inheritance in the community. As the pie chart shows that the influence share of Assamese community is maximum in the Bodo community with 81.90°. The reason behind the influence is because of the community is settled in the state of Assam. The population that the community is surrounded with is Assamese, because of which the community has maximum influence. The influence seemed more in the districts of Baksa and Udalguri, because of the population composition of Assamese community is more those two districts. The influence is also more because of the adjacent districts are Assamese dominant districts of Barpeta, Nelbari, Rangya, Kamrup rural, Darrang, Sonitpur. The influences are majorly seen in terms of language practise, religious practise, marriage rituals, and food habits and over all standards of living. (Plate no. 4.1.1.34.) Within it, the influence in terms of customary laws, property inheritance, access to land holding is crucial. Although the Bodo community is a patriarchal society where women are not accessed to hold land other valuable items. Here the Assamese community has put upon their influence in terms of property inheritance such as weaving and jewellery items. The Bodo women are given with immense owner the properties like hand weaved clothes, Taat sal known as the machine for weaving clothes and silver and gold ornaments. As both Assamese and Bodo community follows patriarchy system, they both do not give the access to have land ownership to the women.

Next to Assamese community, the second highest influencing community is the Bengali community. The degree that it shares is 74.83° having a strong influence in almost all four districts. The major influence that can be seen is in the districts of Kokrajhar and Chirang. Its influence can be seen in terms of religious practise, food habit, dressing style, competitive nature in terms of education and jobs, language and especially property inheritance. Both the community practises patriarchy and thus women does not play a major role in property inheritance. But the strongest influence from the Bengali community is based on the ornaments sharing among the Bodo women. The Bengali community has the tradition of giving gold ornaments as gifts to the women during wedding. This is the most valuable property among the Bengali

women. This tradition has been inherited by the Bodo community in the present-day context. Although both the communities do not follow the practise of land ownership in major, yet in certain cases the land is given to the women. The Bengali women are loud and open speaker, this attitude of Bengali women has also influenced the Bodo women to be an open speaker and have their hands on what they deserve.

Next most influencing community is the Koch Rajbongshi community with the degree of 69.23° followed by Tea tribe with 37.71° and Nepali with 34.47°.

These three communities too have their influence upon the Bodo community. These three communities do practise patriarchy and do not provide land rights to their female. The strongest influence from these three communities upon the Bodo community is seen in terms of language practise, minor religious practise, food habits and dressing. The dressing patterns of Koch Rajbongshi male and female are somewhat like Bodo dressing patterns of male and female. The influence of Koch Rajbongshi can be majorly seen in the districts of Kokrajhar and Chirang. Whereas the influence of Tea tribe can be seen in the districts of Kokrajhar and Udalguri as both the districts have numerous tea gardens. The influence of Nepali community can be seen in the four districts of B.T.A.D. especially in the Northern part of the four districts where it shares its international boundary with Bhutan. Though these three tribes do not have any significant role in influencing the social and cultural practise of Bodo community, but in terms of property inheritance especially from Nepali community can be witnessed. Apart from the above-mentioned communities, other communities such as Rabha, Garo, Missing, Sonowal Kachari and others have significantly less influence. It is because they are sister communities of Kachari. Thus, they share similar type of traditional, social and cultural practises.

The one of the major reasons behind the influence of other communities upon Bodo community is because of the geographical location of the four districts of B.T.A.D. Bodo community is surrounded by the other communities majorly Assamese, Bengali, Koch Rajbongshi, Nepali and Tea Tribe. Apart from that the study area also shares an international boundary with Bhutan with its entire Northern part. This also has some influence upon the community in terms of not just social

cultural, but also in terms of history, economy and politics with the Bhutan government and their residents.

#### **4.1.2. Religion**

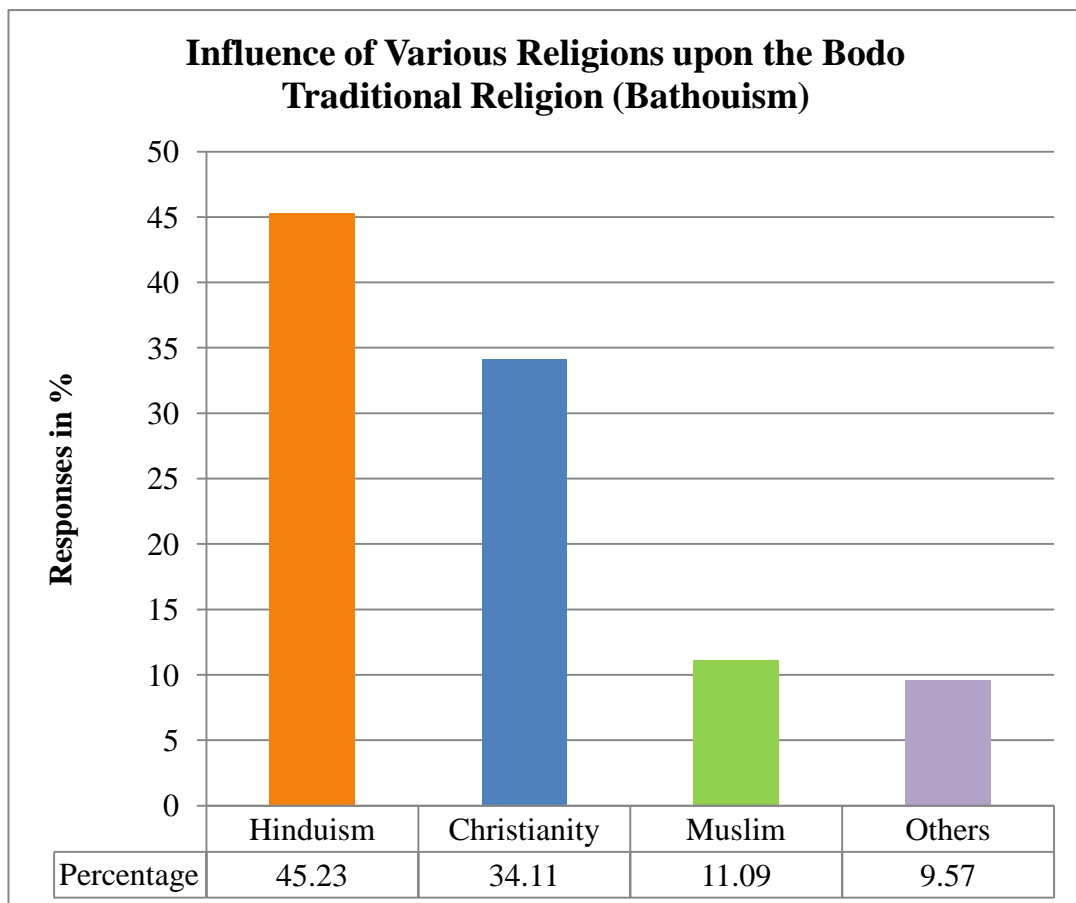
Apart from cultural, the Bodo community also has differences in terms of religion. The community has mainly two dominant religious practises i.e. Hinduism and Christianity. The data collected from the survey of 1222 respondents. About 64.35% of the respondents were Hindu. And rest 35.75% are Christian. As Bodo community is a believer of nature i.e., they believe in animism. Bwrai Bathwo/Bathou is the traditional religion of Bodo community. Again, some of the population considers Bathwo/Bathou as separate religion different from Hinduism. Some records have been found in the census of India report of it in which it is termed as Bathwoism/Bathouism. Within the Hinduism also among the Bodo population, Bathwo/Bathou has two types. One is 'Phool Bathou' and other is 'Boli Bathou'. In Phool Bathou, religious practices are performed by offering flowers and fruits. Whereas, in the Boli Bathou, the religious performances are more intense and sacrifices of animals offering of rice wine etc are practised. The Boli Bathou is the oldest version of Bathouism. The transformation from Boli to Phool Bathouism is very recent. This transformation is taking places more in the towns due to the societal adjustments with other communities. Although the practitioners of Boli Bathou are still dominant in numbers.

Apart from Bathouism Christianity also have divisions among the Bodo people. People in the Northeast, Northern and Northwestern (part) of the study area are the believers of Baptist, Martin Lutheran (M.L.C.). On the other hand, Bodo of central, Eastern and Northwestern (part) are the Catholic.

Traditionally Bodo were only recognised as Hindu. But due to the increasing rate of conversion in the villages by the Christian Missionaries, the followers of Christianity have increased significantly. This transformation of religion also brings changes in the thought processes in terms of land holding systems. Because as per

the Bathouism is concerned Land is considered as Goddess Bwisumutiary and based on that one of the clan among Bodo is considered as Basumatary. They used to be the land dwellers or Jamindars in the past times. *Source- field survey -by an anonymous respondent, Bengtol, Chirang, Kokrajhar, Assam.*

Figure no. 4.1.2.1: Bar graph showing the influence of various religions upon the Bodo traditional religion (Bathouism)



Source: Field survey of the study area.

The above bar graph was prepared based on the data collected from the study area. Here the graph has been prepared to depict the influence of religion upon Bodo community. As mentioned above the Bodo community traditionally is a follower of animism that means nature believer. Apart from that Bodo has their own religion i.e. Bathwo/Bathou. Despite the community has its own religion, the influence from

other religion is also dominant. It has been observed that the Hinduism has been introduced in the form of Brahma Dharma by Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma. (Plate no. 4.1.2.33.). From there on the practise of Bathwo/Bathou has been separated in Bathwoism/Bathouism and Hinduism. The influence of Hindu religion has made changes in the process of worship. The system of Idol worship was not practised but after the Hinduism was introduced the Idol worship is being practised among the Bodo families. The introduction has changed the social, cultural and religious perspective of the Bodo community.

The Bodo as a tribal community was a nature worshiper and followed practised anything and everything in relation with nature. Whereas, after the introduction of Hinduism the system of worship have changed drastically. The influences of practising the worship and rituals have more become like the other non-tribal communities such as Assamese, Bengali, Marwari, Bihari etc. this change has influenced in the role of women in terms of their position in religious practises. Among the Bathwo/Bathou system of religion women were given a sacred position where without the women priest known as Doudini no rituals could have been practised. But among the Hinduism no such position or practise of women's role in worship has been witnessed as a change in the Bodo community.

Apart from the Hinduism, the extreme conversion of Bodo population towards Christianity has been observed since the time of British rule. The facilities and preaching of the religious priest of Christian missionaries has given immense motivation, emotional support, financial strength, educational advantages to the Bodo poor people in the remote locations. The people from the remote villages and particularly in the Northern part have the maximum Christian religious Bodo people in the four districts of study area.

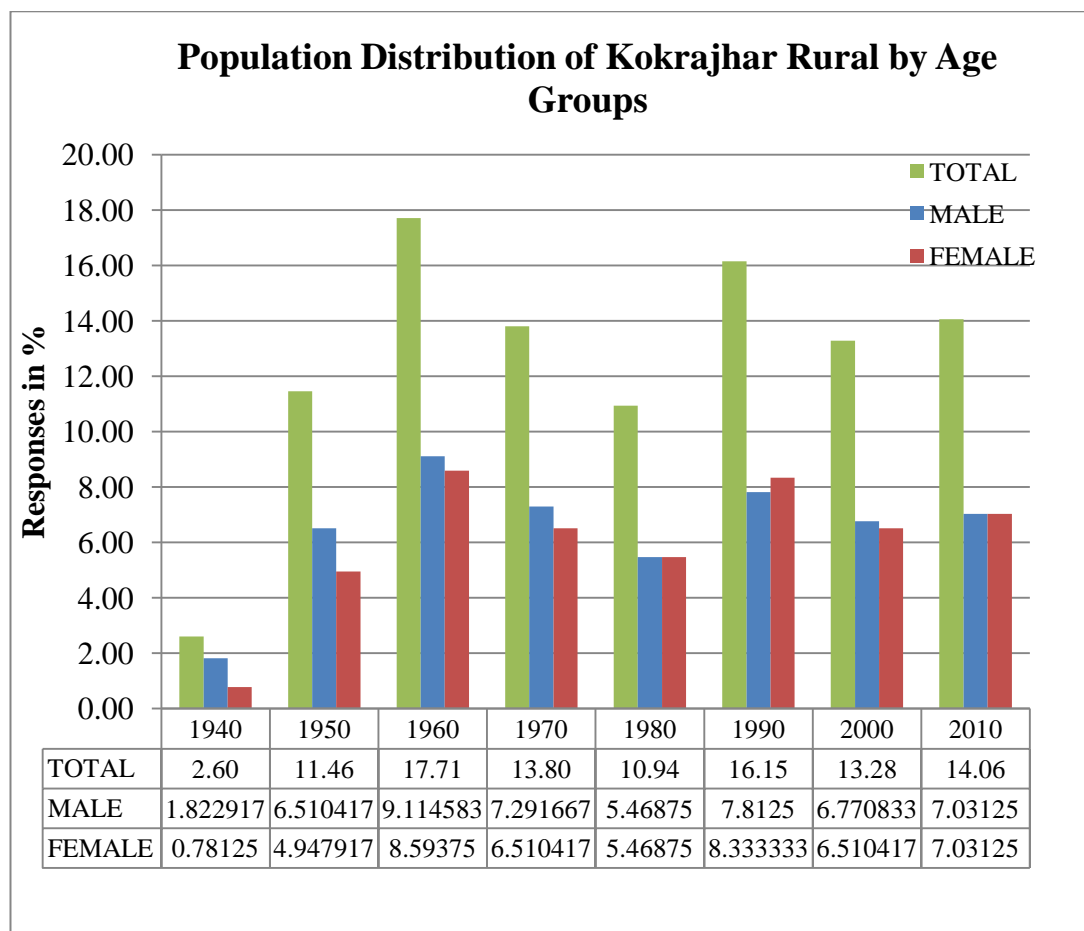
The conversion of Bodo people from Bathwo/Bathou to Christianity has brought upon changes in various ways in the social, cultural, educational, economic aspects. In terms of property inheritance and women and land rights, the Christian people or system of religion seems to be more flexible and modern. Its because of the influence from the Western developed world. Other than these two religions other

religions and its influence upon the Bodo community particularly in terms of women and land rights are significantly less. Although the significance of influence of other religion upon Bodo's traditional religion can be seen in the study area.

#### 4.1.3. Education

Above all the factors, education has been given more emphasis in the interpretation of land holding system in the community by the data collected from the survey. The following graphs intends to highlight the aspects related to education of the study area.

Figure No. 4.1.3.1: Bar graph showing population distribution of Kokrajhar (rural) by age groups of respondents.

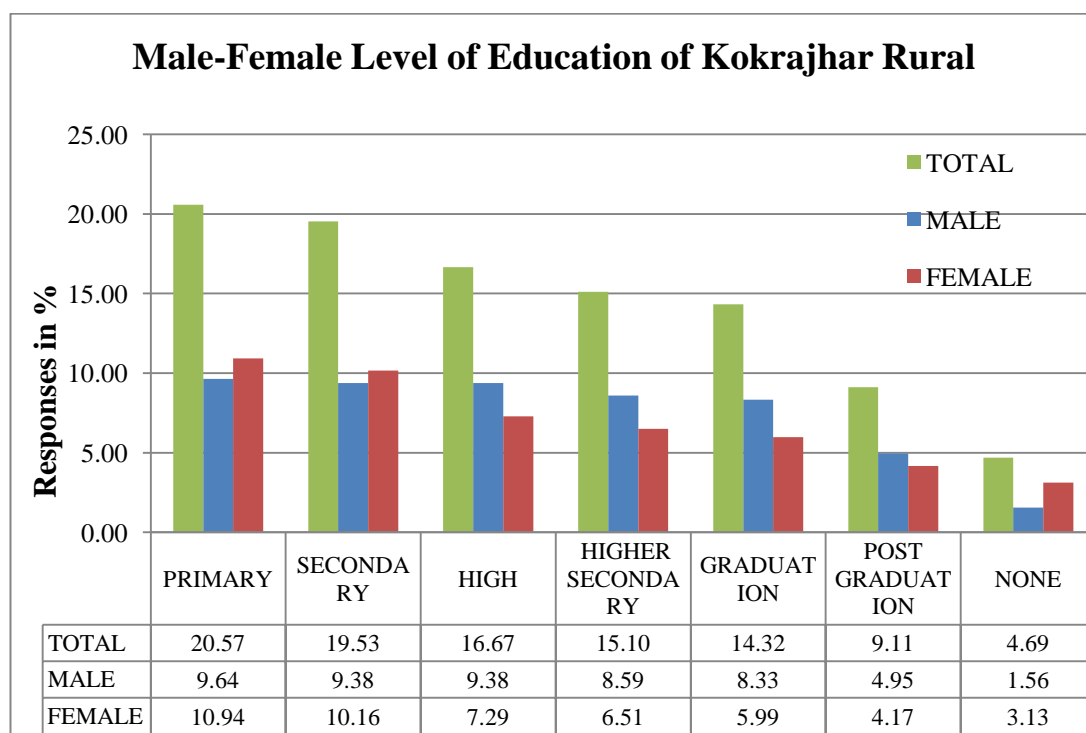


Source: Field survey of the study area.

The above graph shows the distribution of population of the respondent based on gender. Here the graph indicates the share of respondent of the study area. The respondent size of the age group above 1940 is very less. They were the respondent whose age was very high. Their responses have been collected so as to understand their perspective in terms of women and land in the past times. Whereas the respondents in the age group of 1950 and 1960 were maximum because the head of the villages were of that age group.

In the age group of 1980's the maximum responses were from female. It is because that age group was purposively taken as maximum active women in the self-help groups lead and headed by women were of that age group. Responses taken in the age group of 1970's and below 1990 (2000) were having equal share of male and female respondents. Responses from the age group of 2010 have not been recorded because consideration of the responses of a person having age of below 18 years is not appropriate as per the requirement of the topic.

Figure no. 4.1.3.2: Bar graph of male-female level of education of Kokrajhar (rural).



Source: Field Survey of the study area.

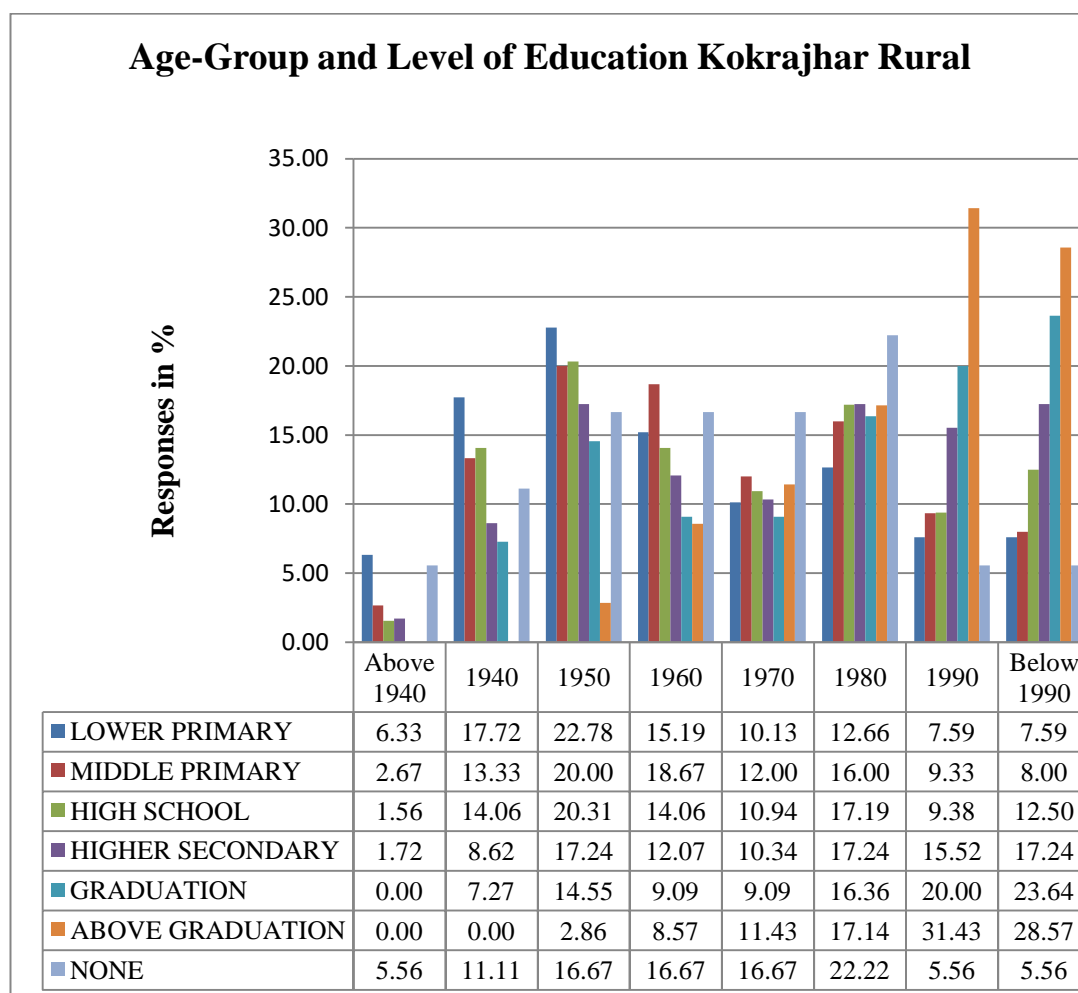
The above bar graph highlights the level of education among male and female percentage in different age group from the rural area of Kokrajhar. It can be clearly understood from the previous graph that maximum population is from the age group of 1950-1980. During that time the education system was not suitable both for male and female.

The current graph here shows the unequal distribution of education. The respondents both male and female are maximum in the primary and secondary level of education. The graph declines towards the higher level of education because the respondent of 1980-2000 age group were less. Maximum respondent was of high ages due to which their education back then was not high. Thus, the percentage of population of lower age group is less and it has led to declining rate in higher level of education in the area.

Women are less in higher education, whereas the percentage of women in primary and secondary level of education is more than men. It shows that in the rural areas women were less exposed to avail education facilities.

There is a fluctuation in the male female education share it is because of the importance of education for female was not identified by the society. Female were not given equal facilities to education in the remote locations of the study area. Another reason could be because of lack of available schools in the villages so that women could have also attained the classes back then.

Figure no. 4.1.3.3: Bar graph showing age-group and level of education of respondents of Kokrajhar (rural).



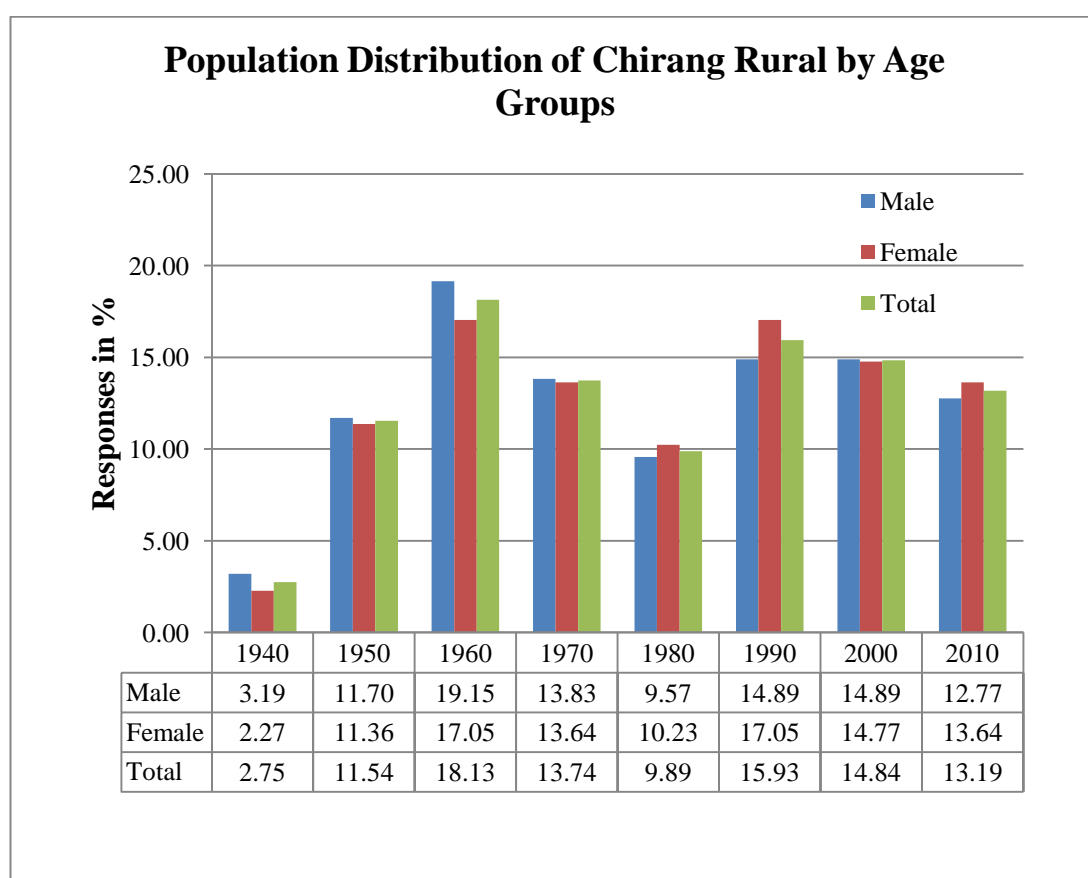
Source: Field Survey of study area.

The above graph shows the level of education as per the age-group of the respondent have been collected and displayed. Before 1940 to 1950 the percentage share of population with education qualification till lower primary to secondary are maximum. The level of education has gradually increased from 1950 onwards. This increase in the level of higher education shows up gradation in the importance of education in the rural areas.

Despite of having increased percentage o population in higher education, yet the quality of education is still endangered condition. This leads to have conflicts in terms of ideologies in relation to the cases of gender equality from both the genders.

Due to the lack of knowledge and awareness, women also create obstacles for the other women in the name of humanity and legacy as such. Thus, the quality of education and understanding the gendered requirements in a community is essential for a balanced and sustainable development.

Figure no. 4.1.3.4: Bar graph showing population distribution of Chirang (rural) by age groups of respondents.



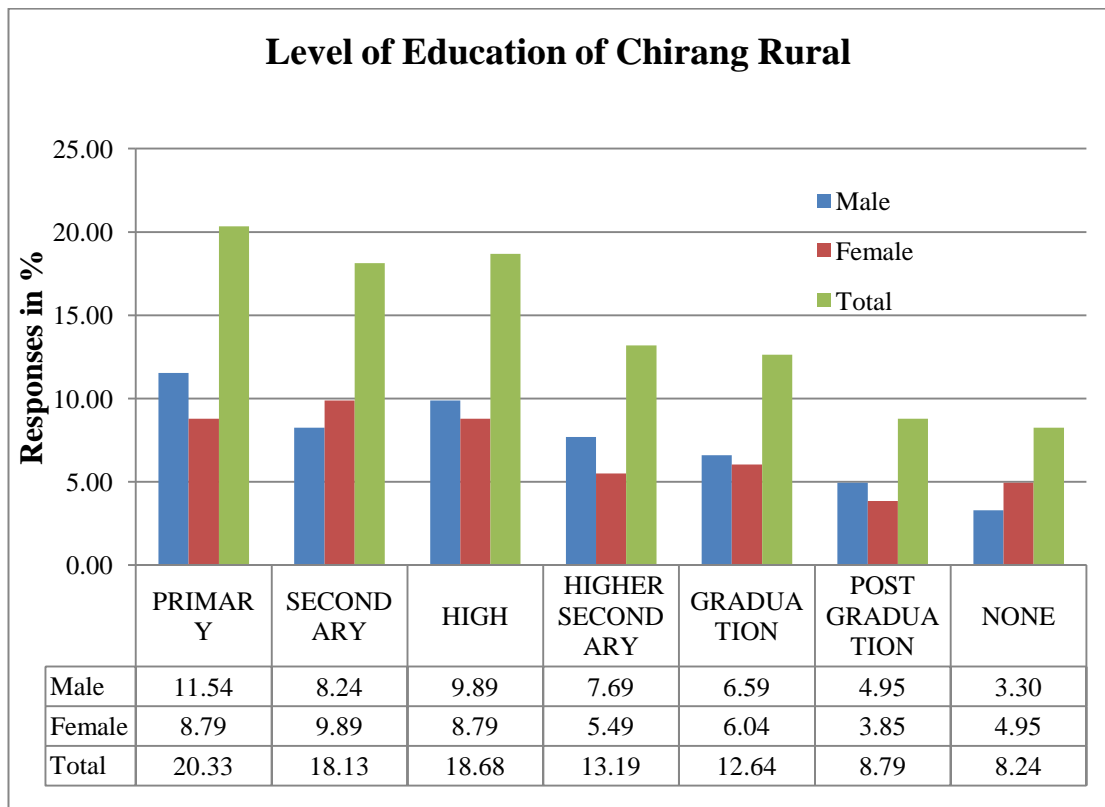
Source: Field Survey of the study area.

The above bar graph was prepared mainly based on the data collected from the study area. The graph shows the population distribution of male and female respondent from the rural areas of Chirang based on their age groups. Here from the graph it has been found that the maximum number of respondents was from the age group of 1960. The major reason of having that age group was because the targeted age group of respondents was from 1950-1960. That age group was targeted intentionally because to have more focused responses. The people from this age

group were currently from the age ranges to 50-60 years. It means they have experienced both the traditional and modern shift in the practices performed by the community in terms of land and property holding. There in the responses itself the dominance of male over female can be identified with the number of respondents.

Apart from that particular age group the responses from the 1990 and 2000 were ranging at second and third highest respondents. The responsible reason was because of the data collected using Google form during the Covid-19 pandemic. Due to the Covid-19 protocols physical field survey was impossible to conduct. In such a case Google form was used to collect data. In that context it has helped unintentionally in terms of collecting dynamic data from different age groups. It has helped to analyse the difference of thinking process and requirements between the age groups. It has been found that the female respondents were more in 1990 and 2000 than male respondents.

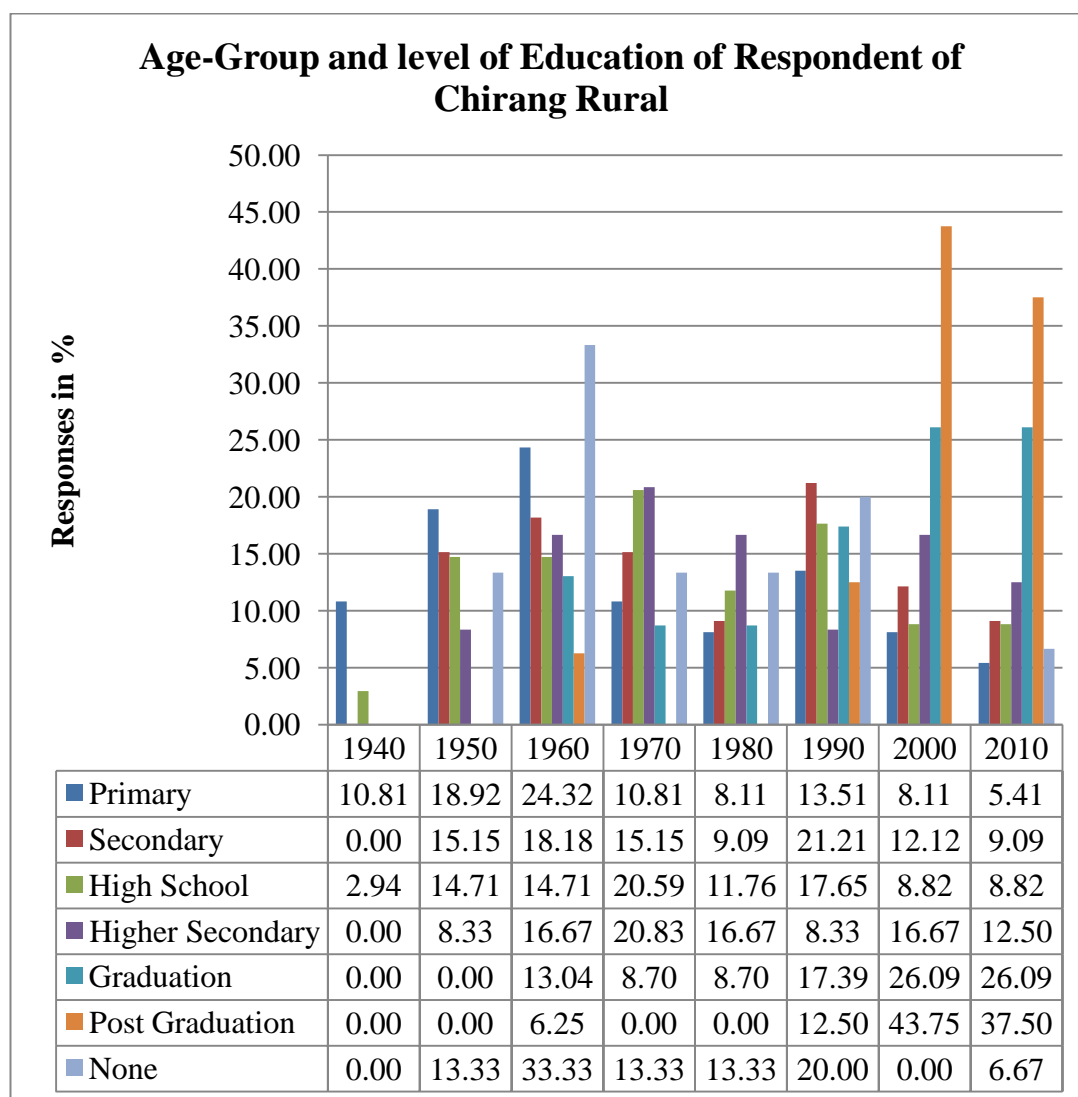
Figure no. 4.1.3.5: Bar graph of male-female level of education of Chirang (rural).



Source: Field Survey of the study area.

The above table intends to show the level of education of the respondents of both male and female. There the female is having comparatively less access to education in the district of Chirang. Although the percentage of education level between male and female was minor, still it plays a vital role in determining the women and land relationship in the area. It also incorporates about the role of women in terms of decision making in availing access to education.

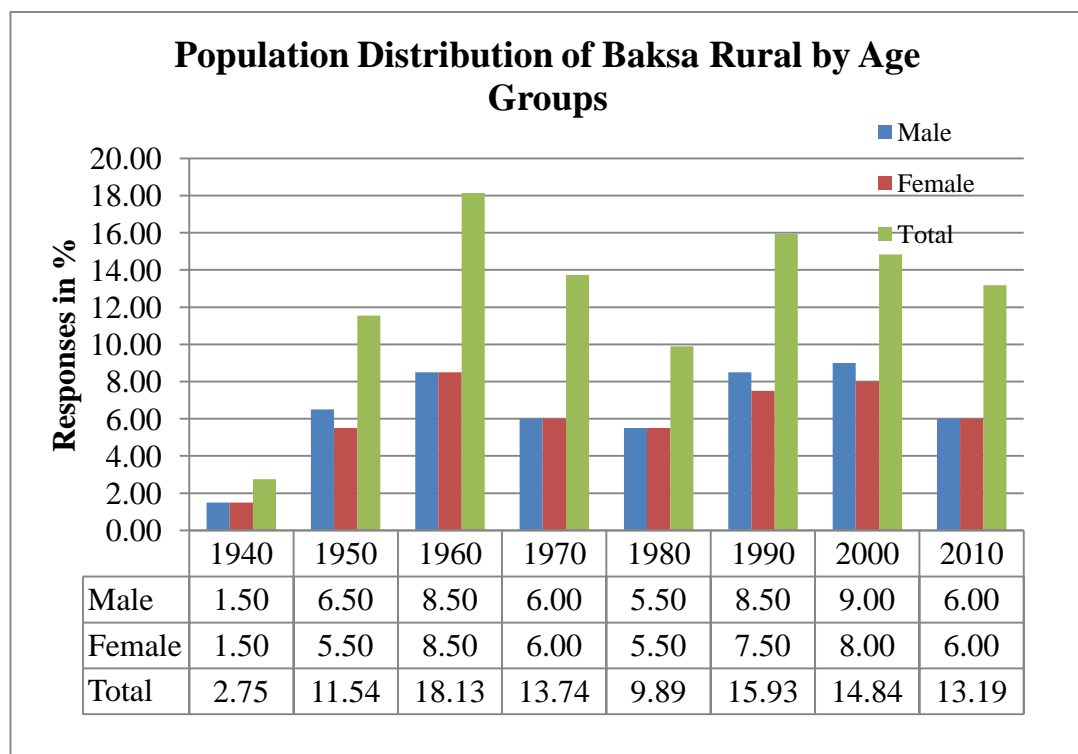
Figure no. 4.1.3.6: Bar graph showing age-group and level of education of respondents of Chirang (rural).



Source: Field Survey of the study area.

As a tribal community, the people hardly used to give importance to education which has impacted not only in the level of development in general but in terms of women education as well. The table shows the percentage of education among the older age group was having lesser level of education. On the other hand, the new generation from the age group of 1980's onwards there is an increase in the level of attaining higher education. The reason could be the understanding of importance of education especially during the unrest situation in the area and to try to bring peace in the surrounding.

Figure no. 4.1.3.7: Bar graph showing population distribution of Baksa (rural) by age groups of respondents.

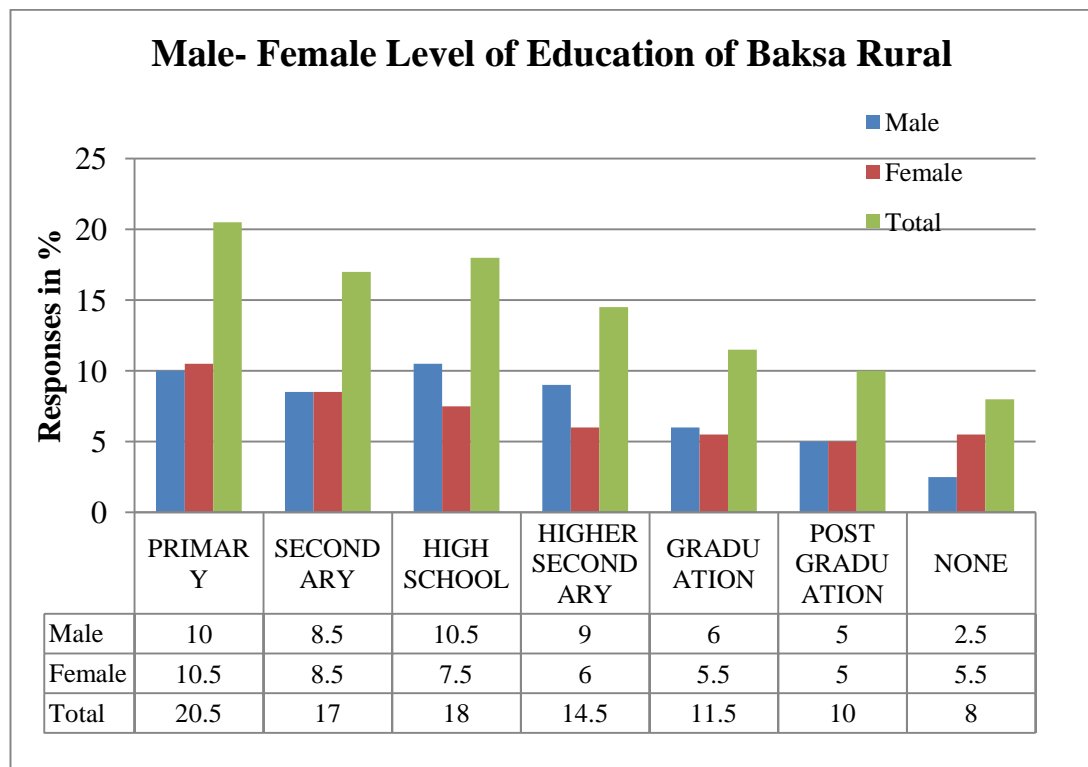


Source: Field Survey of the study area.

The above bar graph shows the responses of the population of Baksa rural area based on the age group of the respondents. As like the responses from the other districts the share of responses from the age group of 1960 was the highest. They

were the targeted age group of respondents because of the information provided by their life experiences. This is very interesting to note that the male female responses of 1960 age group were also same. According to the responses given by the population of Baksa rural several concerning information in terms of level of education, choice of economic activities and decision making came into lame light. Apart from the age group of 1960, the responses from the age group of 1970, 1950 and 1980 respectively. However, the share of responses from 1990 and 2000 were also high. These responses were majorly collected through Google form during the COVID-19 pandemic. The responses collected from the new generation have certain differences in terms of gender equality. Especially in terms of property and land rights there was a difference in the responses. The different data collected from the respondents belonging to various age groups were tabulated and discussed in the following chapters with suitable diagram for better understanding.

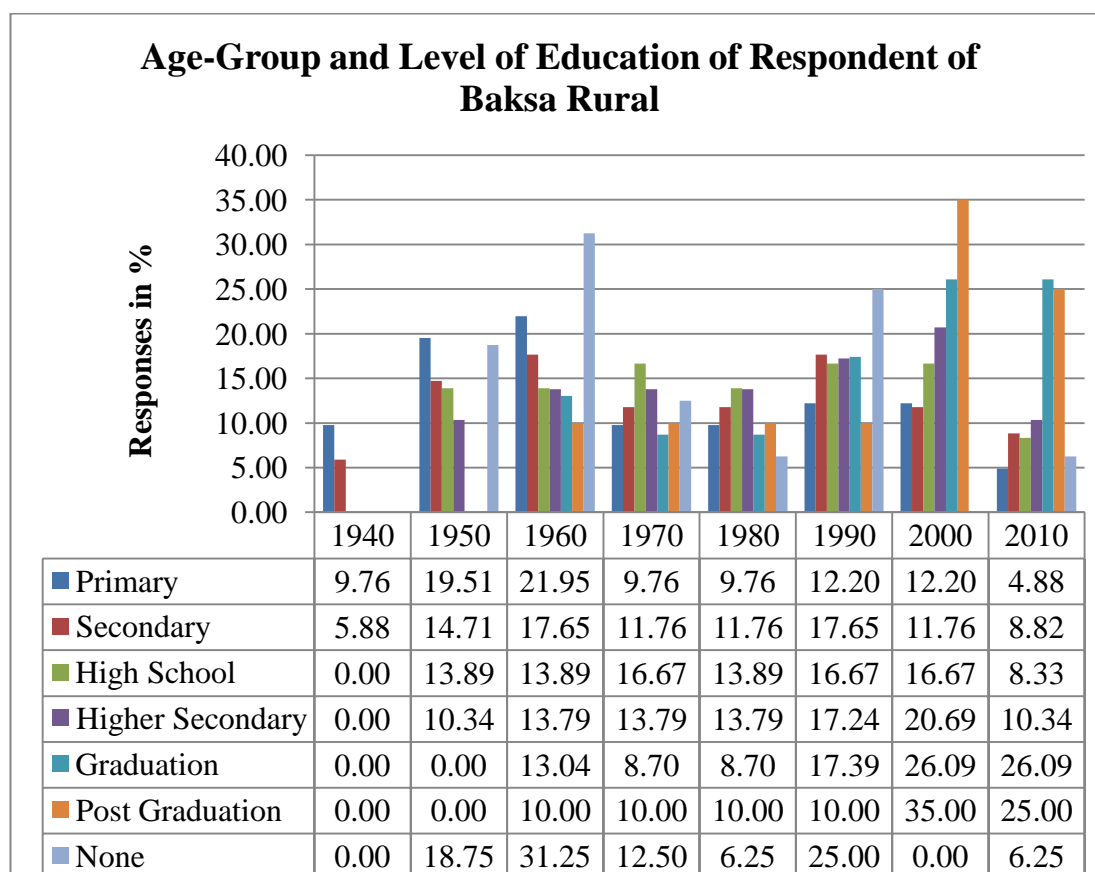
Figure no. 4.1.3.8: Bar graph of male-female level of education of Baksa (rural).



Source: Field Survey of the study area.

The above table intends to show the level of education of the respondents of both male and female. There the female is having comparatively less access to education in the district of Baksa. Although the percentage of education level between male and female was minor, still it plays a vital role in determining the women and land relationship in the area. It also incorporates about the role of women in terms of decision making in availing access to education.

Figure no. 4.1.3.9: Bar graph showing age-group and level of education of respondents of Baksa (rural).

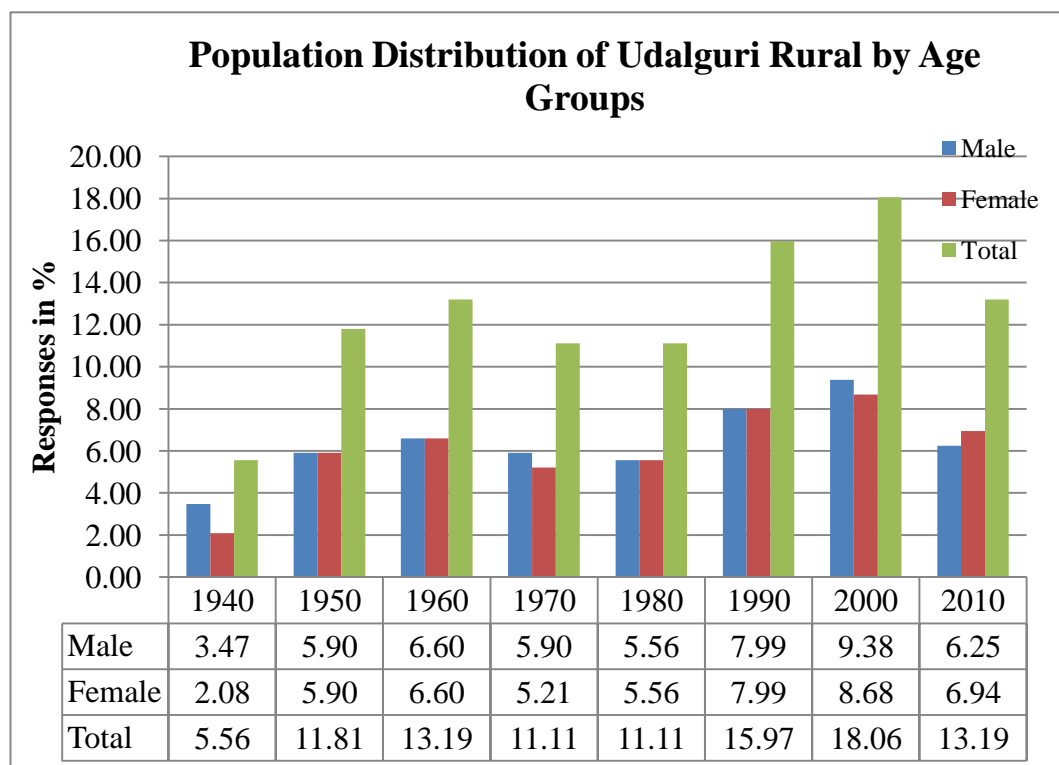


Source: Field Survey of the study area.

As a tribal community, the people hardly used to give importance to education which has impacted not only in the level of development in general but in terms of women education as well. The table shows the percentage of education

among the older age group was having lesser level of education. On the other hand, the new generation from the age group of 1980's onwards there is an increase in the level of attaining higher education. The reason could be the understanding of importance of education especially during the unrest situation in the area and to try to bring peace in the surrounding.

Figure no. 4.1.3.10: Bar graph showing population distribution of Udalguri (rural) by age groups of respondents.



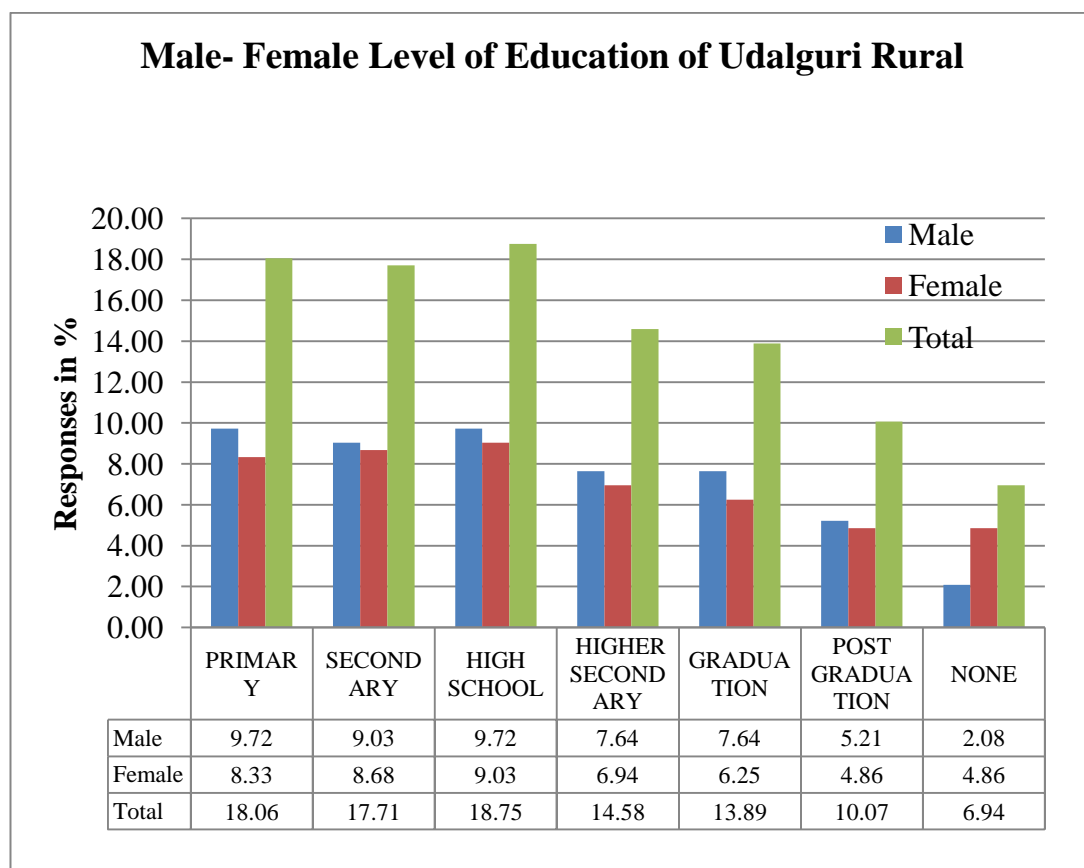
Source: Field Survey of the study area.

The following bar group has been prepared based on the data collected from the district of Udalguri rural areas in relation to the number of respondents according to their age groups. The graph here too shows similar trend like the other three districts of the study area. The maximum responses were the age group of 1960. The population from this age group were more because they were holding better information in relation to the requirement of the topic of discussion. Apart from that

second highest age group was from 1950, 1970 and 1980 respectively. It is interesting to note that the number of responses from male and female were almost equal. This gave more clear data in terms of women-based questions especially from the women's perspective.

Apart from that the Google form has collected dynamic responses from the newer generation. The highest respondents from the new generation were from 2000, 1990 and 2010 respectively. The responses from the new generation were moreover talking about the changes in the traditional practises of Bodo community. The data collected from the district have been combined with the rest and have been analysed in the following chapters.

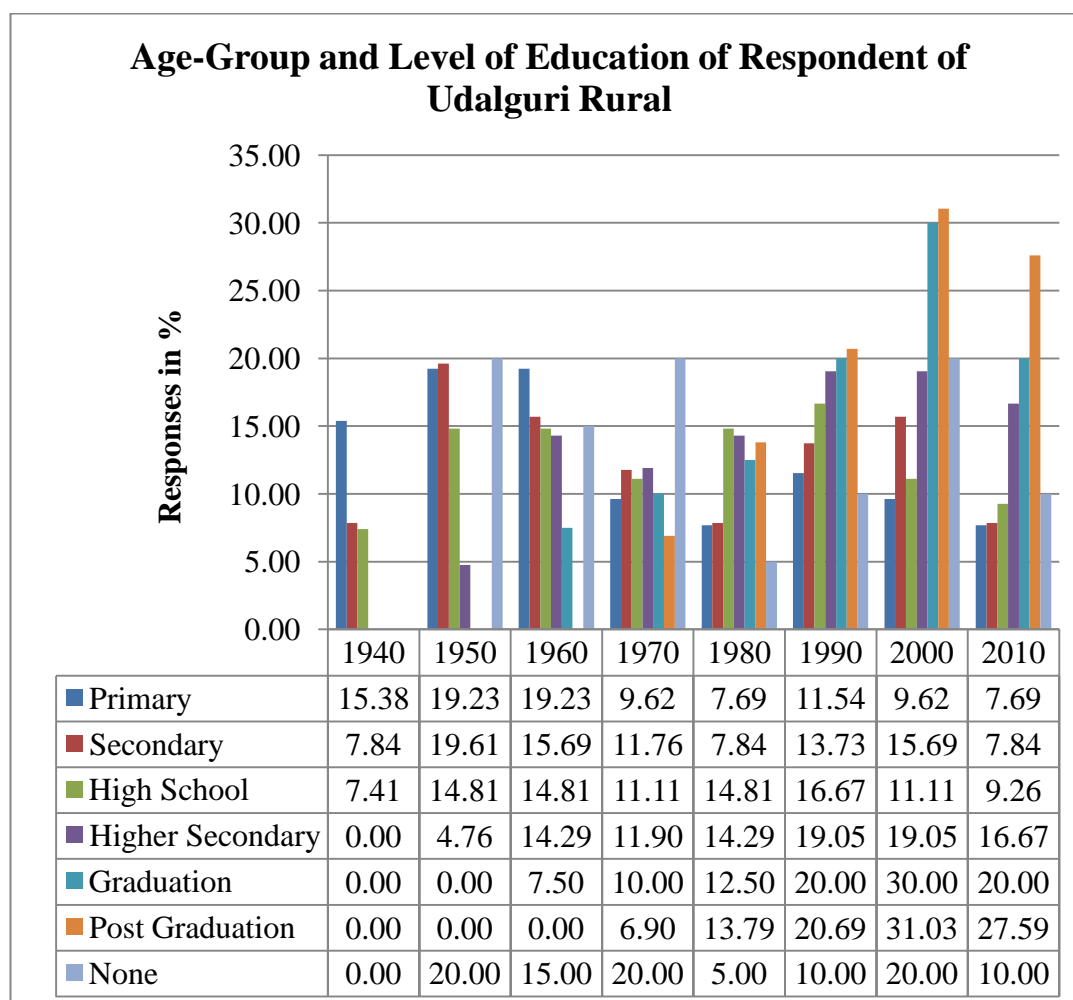
Figure no. 4.1.3.11: Bar graph of male-female level of education of Udalguri (rural).



Source: Field Survey of the study area.

The above table intends to show the level of education of the respondents of both male and female. There the female is having comparatively less access to education in the district of Udalguri. Although the percentage of education level between male and female was minor, still it plays a vital role in determining the women and land relationship in the area. It also incorporates about the role of women in terms of decision making in availing access to education.

Figure no. 4.1.3.12: Bar graph showing age-group and level of education of respondents of Udalguri (rural).



Source: Field Survey of the study area.

As a tribal community, the people hardly used to give importance to education which has impacted not only in the level of development in general but in terms of women education as well. The table shows the percentage of education among the older age group was having lesser level of education. On the other hand, the new generation from the age group of 1980's onwards there is an increase in the level of attaining higher education. The reason could be the understanding of importance of education especially during the unrest situation in the area and to try to bring peace in the surrounding.

Table no. 4.1.3.1: Table showing the maximum level of respondent Bodo women based on age-groups from the study area.

Age group of Women Respondents (in Decade)	No. of Total Women Responses (District wise) (Kokrajhar+Chirang+Baksa+Udalguri)	Maximum level of Education
1931-1940	3+2+6+6=17	Illiterate to Primary & Secondary
1941-1950	19+10+14+17=60	Illiterate to High School
1951-1960	33+15+20+19=87	Illiterate to Higher Secondary & Graduation
1961-1970	25+12+15+15=67	Illiterate to Graduation
1971-1980	21+9+14+16=60	Primary to Post Graduation
1981-1990	32+15+18+23=88	Primary to Post Graduation
1991-2000	25+13+19+25=82	Primary to Post Graduation
2001-2010	27+12+15+20=74	Secondary to Graduation
2011-2020	20+12+15+64	Primary to Secondary as per current age

Source: Field Survey of the study area.

The above table showing the maximum level of respondent Bodo women based on age-groups from the study area. The age group of the women respondents have been categorised in a decadal wise from 1931-2020 based on the field survey data. Here the table intended to show the extent of women in terms of education. Here from the table women from older age group are limited to education facilities. Many of the women are illiterate even till the age group of 1931-1960. Many of the women are limited to educate themselves only it primary to secondary level of

education in 1931-1940. During 1940-1950 the level of education was limited to illiterate to High School. The concept behind less women engagement in education is an outcome of several reasons. Most important was the lack of educational institution during that period. Another major reason was the thought process of the people to let women/girl study for the development. The facility of education was limited to only male member of the family. Women/girl child were limited to learn only the household works and were not allowed to study. Later, after few decades and introduction of Christian missionaries and some government-oriented schools, the girls were only allowed to study till primary and at the maximum level of high school. Here, the role of male member of the family, community has a strong role to identify and decide whether the girl will be allowed to study or not, if allowed than till what level of education she can acquire was all decided by the male member of the family.

Later on, the time changed, and women were given the little access to study till graduation from 1961 onwards according to the women respondent's age group. Even though women were given the access to study but the selection of subject, selection of choosing stream as well as institution was decided by the male member of the family. The controlling power of one's education was relied upon someone else. Especially, women had the access to study by taking Arts stream in Higher Secondary and Graduation. Women were urged to study the subjects such as Home Science, Education, and History as they are related to learning household behaviours and manners. Women did not have the access to explore the public space in the name of safety and security.

Thus, in terms of education those above-mentioned subjects were meant for women to study. Women were only allowed to go to school or college and direct back to home in the name of safety in the study area. These instances had limited the wings of the women who wanted to study beyond the limitations. Slowly time started to change, and women got the liberty to study till post-graduation from 1971 till date. This liberty was also given with several rules and restrictions to follow. Such restrictions were in terms of subject selection, hostel selection, institution selection, dressing, financial constraint etc. these limitations were created not just to safeguard

the women outside going for studies, and instead it was a shield from the society and people who are against female education in the community.

Such kind of limitations and less level of education was one of the biggest issues for the women to develop in the society. They were not just limited to education but also were limited to awareness regarding their rights and identity. Such restriction also depicts the male dominance in the society and women's life. Somewhere, it is because of those restrictions in the past, women were left with limited ideas and awareness about their own freedom. Because of which the women from older age groups creates some restrictions for themselves as well as the new generations.

*According to an anonymous elderly women respondent from Kokrajhar district, 'Jwngni somao lekha bw gwiya mwn, phorainwbw hwaa mwn henjao phwr khwo, dalai gw dan jug ao phorainw hwbaoswi'. It means- During our times there were no books available and moreover, female were not allowed to study like today's new generation girls have got facilities to study.*

## **4.2. ECONOMIC FACTOR**

The economic setup of the Bodo community revolves around the nature. The community is depended upon the natural resources in one hand and facilities provided by the government on the other.

### **4.2.1 Traditional economic activities performed by women in the past**

The journey of a Bodo woman in earning money to run the family has started from their home kitchen to the streets of the local market. Ironically, in the past women having no proper education facility, tries to find out ways in raising the family in whatever way possible. Economic activities like selling products from the windows of kitchen itself such as dried fish, dried meat, fermented fish, 'pithas'-steamed rice cakes, vegetables, etc. The products like 'emao'-locally produced paste

and cake of herbs used to make 'Zou' i.e. local rice beer and selling the 'Zou' local rice beer at minimal price to raise some amount to fulfil the requirements of the children, extra expenses of the household and for her personal needs with the left over amount. Traditionally Bodo women are skilled with weaving of the traditional attires worn by both men and women. Traditional attires such as 'Aronai' i.e. scurf used for honouring someone with respect, 'Gamsa' worn by men wrapped around the waist and 'Dokhona-Jwmgra/Sadri/Shawl' worn by Bodo women with specific hand crafted designs in the manual looms present almost in every courtyard of Bodo family. Bodo women weave their own Dokhona-Jwmgra with some extra pieces to sell to raise back the amount she invested in manufacturing. Selling of those hand weaved dresses are the basic economic activity of Bodo women in the villages. Through the amount earned from selling will again be invested in weaving another batch of the attire and the cycle goes on. 'Aadi' or lease system of weaving clothes is of significance. Through this system the investment in terms of money or material is made by one and the weaver will weave only. The final product is shared equally in between the investor and the weaver which can be again goes for sell in the local markets or directly from the loom. Through all these activities, Bodo women have been supporting the family in maintaining the requirements of the house economically as well as the household activities simultaneously. Although these activities were rarely praised by the male dominant society and partially even by the women herself does not pay value to her own works and contributions she makes in the family. (Plate no. 4.2.1.25.), (Plate no. 4.2.1.26.), (Plate no. 4.2.1.27.).

#### **4.2.2 Modern economic activities performed by women in the present**

The modern population is still dependent majorly upon agriculture. The agricultural activity is supported by the fertile land and access of natural drainage system. Although the techniques of agricultural practises have shifted to mechanised techniques from the traditional. Such a shift from traditional to modern is because of the increasing demand of the products in the local market.

Bodo women often have been portrait to have equality in contributing to the family through her activities since the past. Comparing to the other communities of India, Bodo women are fortunate enough as one of the tribal communities of Northeast India. Opportunities have been provided to participate equally in raising the family since the time immemorial through various ways of earning. Regardless to the fact, question arises in its practise. The activities carried out by the women are in supporting the family and society are without being registered as worker in the work force participation record. Yet the share of respect she deserves out of the efforts she puts are rarely adjoins to her name, which is the painful reality.

Currently, the Bodo women are very much active in the economic activities passed down to her through generations as legacy in the market economy. The products which were sold from the kitchen are now being sold in the local markets directly by the women. They occupy their own specific plot of portion in the markets to sell the same kitchen produced goods equally just like the men do in the market.

The transformation was not easy at all, in a male dominant society. The present era is though changing and so as the mindsets as well of both men and women in the society. Yet, several allegations of loyalty, trust issues and reliability rose upon the Bodo women both in public as well as private spheres. Moreover, it can be noted that more than men it is the women who acts at times as the obstacle and creates challenges for her own self. Whereas a man who usually takes the women for granted in terms of dependency and decision making, were becoming liberal to some extent.

With the advancement of technology, education facilities for women, several Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Self-Help Groups (SHGs) has helped in developing the Bodo women from the towns and villages. It has helped them in improving the economic activities and doing the same in larger scale for better development and generates maximum revenue. Although these women are neither enrolled as businesswomen nor as cultivator in the work force participation record. They are moreover addressed as housewife or home maker, which has deprived those small-scale sellers and weavers.

*Beautiful response given by one woman seller- “Jwnglai henjao mahari kha, mwjang-gajri gasibw buthum jwb nangw”. “Jwnglai Bima hari kha, pisa ni jiu khangnwthakai, mwdwi bw srwwd phugar khuma nangw” i.e. (We are women, we have to embrace all good and bad elements of life. We are mothers, who have to silently wipe off the tears for the sake of our children).(Narzary, 2022). (Plate no. 4.2.2.28.), (Plate no. 4.2.2.29.), (plate no. 4.2.2.30.).*

### 4.2.3. Freedom of choice of economic activities

The Bodo women were engaged in the economic activities to stabilise the household responsibilities and run the family with whatever skills she has. Moreover, the choice of economic activities in the traditional system lies in the hands of the women depending upon her skills and techniques. However, the influence of patriarchy seems to be dominant in the present-day context in terms of choosing the economic activity.

Table no. 4.2.3.1: Table showing the engagement of Bodo women in different economic activities based on their education qualification and age groups from the study area.

Age group of Women Respondents (in Decade)	No. of Total Women Responses (District wise) (Kokrajhar+Chirang +Baksa+Udalguri)	Maximum level of Education	Engagement in different Economic Activities
1931-1940	3+2+6+6=17	Illiterate to Primary & Secondary	More no worker than farmer, weaver and house helper.
1941-1950	19+10+14+17=60	Illiterate to High School	More no worker than farmer, weaver, house helper and School teacher.
1951-1960	33+15+20+19=87	Illiterate to Higher Secondary & Graduation	More no worker than farmer, weaver, house helper and School teacher, Nurse.

1961-1970	25+12+15+15=67	Illiterate to Graduation	More School teacher, nurse than no worker, farmer, weaving, and house helper.
1971-1980	21+9+14+16=60	Primary to Post Graduation	More schoolteacher, nurse, Asha worker than administrative worker, no worker, farmer, weaving, and house helper.
1981-1990	32+15+18+23=88	Primary to Post Graduation	More schoolteacher, nurse, Asha worker than administrative worker, no worker, farmer, weaving, and house helper.
1991-2000	25+13+19+25=82	Primary to Post Graduation	More schoolteacher, professor, doctor, nurse, Asha worker than administrative worker, no worker, farmer, weaving, and house helper.
2001-2010	27+12+15+20=74	Secondary to Graduation	More student than schoolteacher, nurse, Asha worker, administrative worker, weaver etc.
2011-2020	20+12+15+64	Primary to Secondary as per current age	Mostly student/and No worker.

Source: Field survey of the study area.

The above table shows the level of economic activities Bodo women were engaged in based on their education qualification and age group of the women respondents from the study area. As mentioned and elaborated in the table no. 4.1.5.1, about the system of education and selection of education by the women imposed by the male member of the family and society.

Here in this table, it has been found that based on their level of education they have chosen their economic activities. During the old time, women had less chances of having enough education qualification to acquire economic activities. It is because of lack of education women were left with limited economic activities. They could

not engage in any economic activities based on their education qualification because at that point of time they were either illiterate or only literate enough to write their names. Thus, many of the Bodo women ended up becoming home maker, none worker than farmer, weaver and house helper. After wards the period of 1951-60 came the women got a little liberty to study till High Secondary. With that education qualification they started to get engaged as schoolteacher, nurse farmer, etc.

When the period of 1961-80 arrived, the women got the access to study till graduation with arts stream and post-graduation partially. With several restrictions women with the graduation qualification started to engage themselves as schoolteacher, nurse, administrative worker, etc. Because of the subject and stream choosing restrictions women had limited option to work based on their education qualification. Here the role of male in choosing economic activities based on education qualification was highly dominating. Women were left to either work based on the subject they studied or choose an economic activity based on their inbuilt or learned skill like cooking, house maintenance work, house helper, liquor seller, vegetable seller, farmer and as such.

When the period of 1991 till current came the women somewhere got more exposure to the world. In terms of education, economy and political movements that was coming up in the study area has trigger the sentiment of women. It made the women realise of their skills and capabilities due to the several anti-social movements for free Bodo state with the government. It is not always necessary male members has always created obstacles for women to rise, at times men has immensely supported and appreciated to what women can do. It is also the women at times who over looks at her capacities and create their own obstacles.

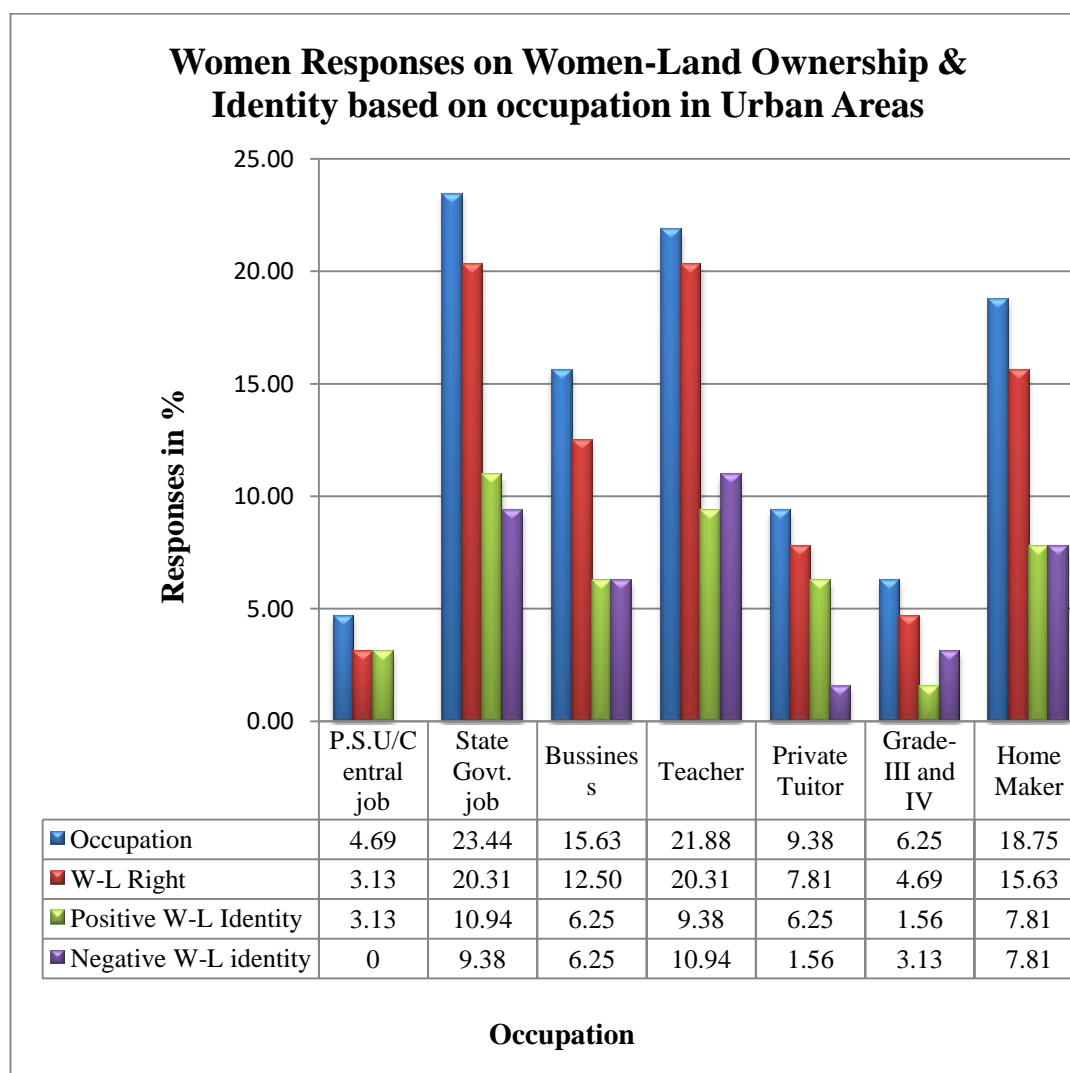
#### **4.2.4. Responses on women-land ownership in terms of economic point of view**

The above table has discussed and linked the education with the choice of economic activities, in which the role of male member has also been seen dominating. When it came about discussing in relation to women-land ownership the

dominance of patriarchy also showed its influence. Women engaged in any economic activities were in a dilemma to whether claim for women and land right. The women were not reluctant to take decision to whether they want such rights for themselves. However, there was a difference in terms of responses among the women from urban and the rural areas.

From the urban areas those women who were economically sound responded that they want to have women and land rights provided with conditions that the ultimate decision of having or even buying land will depend upon the male member of the family. Whereas in terms of rural areas, those who were economically engaged but not sound they don't want women and land rights. On the other hand those who do not have economic stability want to have women and land rights to be relevant in the society. These women from the rural were the one who were deprived of attaining their basic rights due to financial issues and dominance of male centric society. They didn't want their next generation to be in the same condition as they currently were in. The following graphs shows exactly the responses collected from field survey of the study area.

Figure no. 4.2.4.1: Responses on women land ownership and identity in the urban areas.



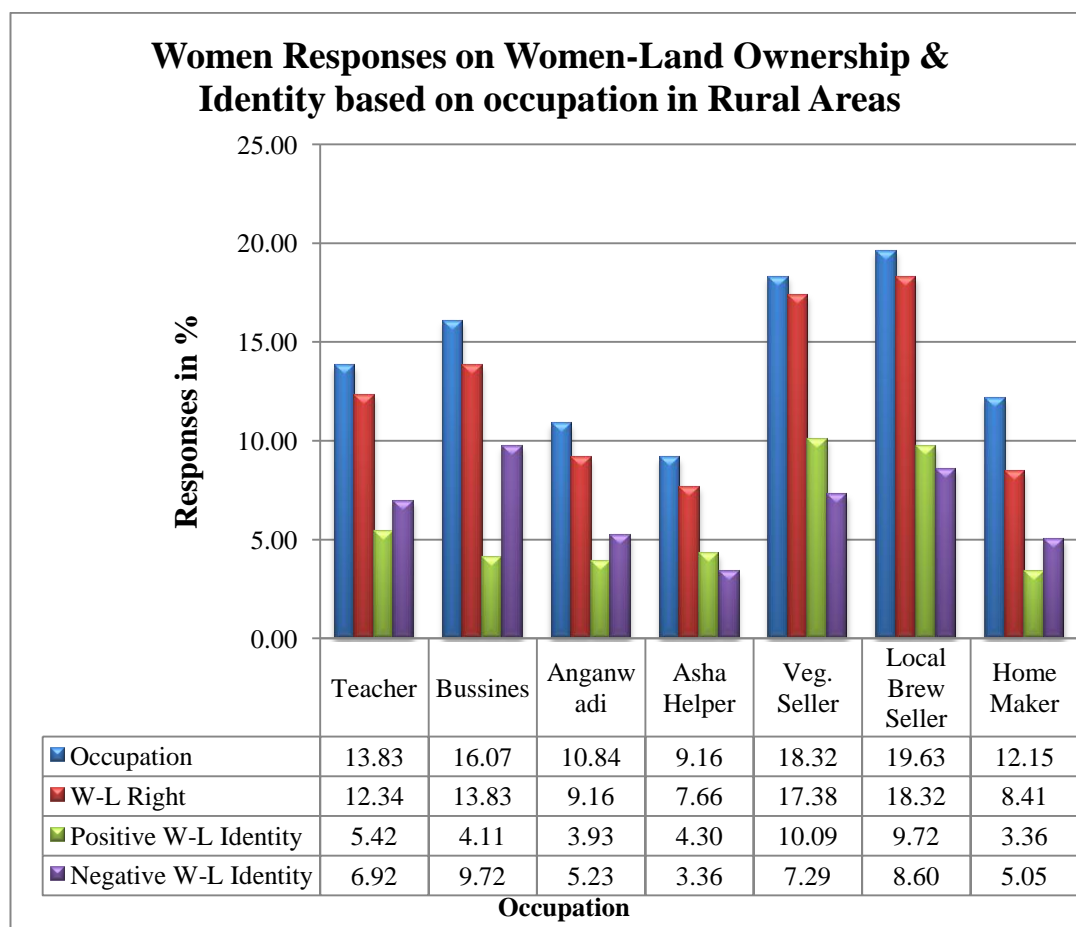
Source: Field Survey of the study area.

The above graph highlights the women's responses in terms of women and land rights in the urban areas. Here the graph shows the maximum occupation is from State govt job and govt and private teacher including the home makers. Simultaneously, the women gave responses that women must be given the land rights. Although the percentage share of positive responses are less in compare to the negative responses. Because the women are reluctant to have extra workload of the offices and public administration. They do not want to take extra burden of work thus

they gave negative responses to the women and land rights and as well as to consideration of land as their identity.

*According to the anonymous women respondent from Kokrajhar district: “jwng sakhri mao nanwi thaka khamai nanwi noni bw khamani mao nanwi jwng ha arw haa ni pharse saannw swlabaa. Nathai gsww dong babw noni geder phwra ma bungw bejwng swli nanggwn” It means- Even though we earn, after doing office work as well as household works, we hardly have time to think of owning land. Ever if we think of so still, the final decision will be based on the elder person of the family.*

Figure no. 4.2.4.2: Responses on women land ownership and identity in the rural areas.



Source: Field Survey of the study area.

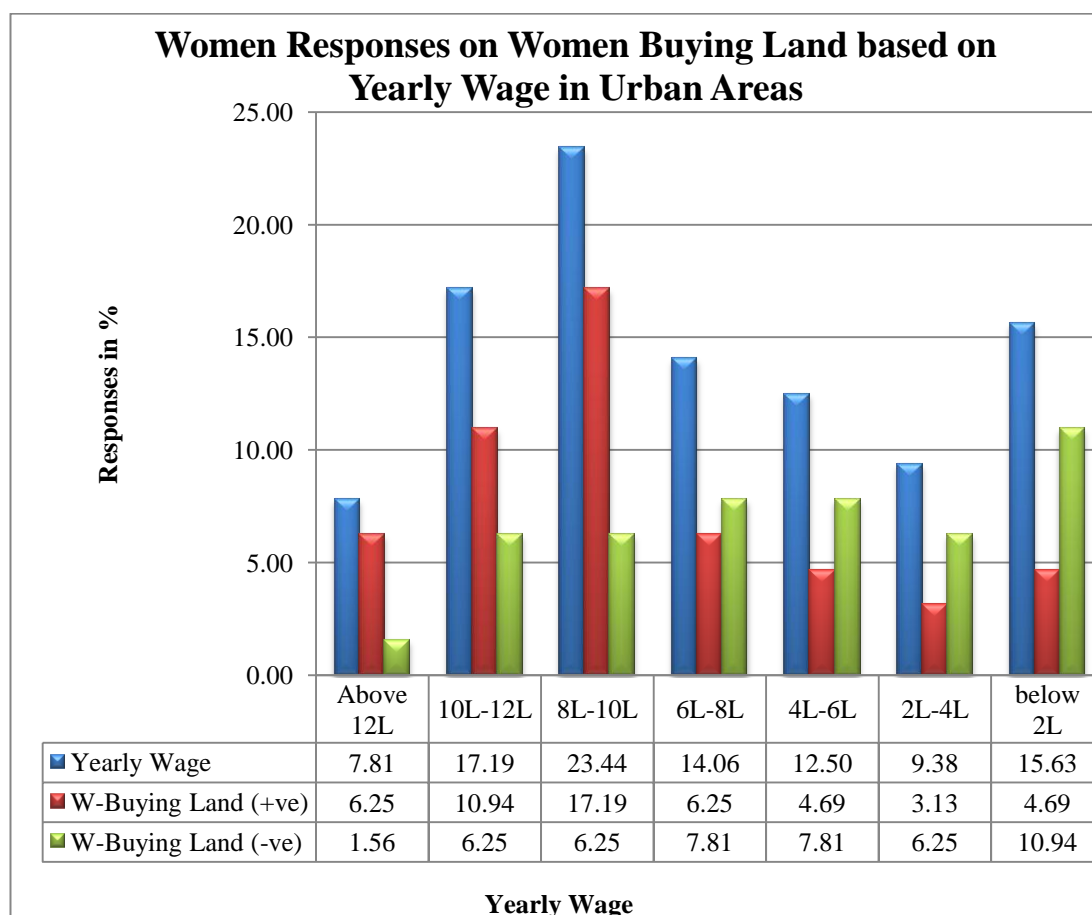
The above graph shows the women responses to land ownership and identity in the rural areas based on the occupation. Here the maximum women were engaged as vegetable sellers, Liquor seller and businesswomen. All the categories of the women have given responses in the favour of women can own land and make it as their identity. But when it comes to the positive responses its very interesting to note that those who are permanent women workers, they gave less positive responses than in comparison to the temporary worker or worker with least salary.

The reason was like that of the responses from the urban areas that they do not think they can handle any further administrative works so as to claim land. On the other hand, women from vegetable seller and liquor seller gave positive responses because they want to have land of their own as their identity so that they can provide better quality and security of life to them of springs.

*According to a woman respondent from Chirang rural: “Jwng wndwiyao bw phorainw mwna swi, dabw mwjangsakri maonw mwna swi. Gsw dong pisa phwrkhwo phwrwng annwi sakri lanw hathwng. Haa khwo bw gao bainw hathwng”. It means- The woman was unable to get proper education due to which she was not engaged in any economic activity as such. She wants her daughter to learn as much as possible, get into a job and own her land.*

*According to a widowed women respondent from Kokrajhar: “Henjao phwra jerao bw akha phaka kha. Haa khwo bw lanw hanai gwhw dong henjao mahari nao. Manw hwnw ba jwng phisai ni sayao lo asha lananwi janai nonga. Dani joog ao jiu khang nanggwo aa gwrlwi nonga sase phisai gwiwi henjao ni thakai”. It means- Women are capable of doing and handling everything. Women must also posses the courage to take the responsibility of owning land. Because in this new era, for a widowed woman, it is difficult to lead a life”.*

Figure no. 4.2.4.3: Responses on women buying land based on yearly wage in urban areas.

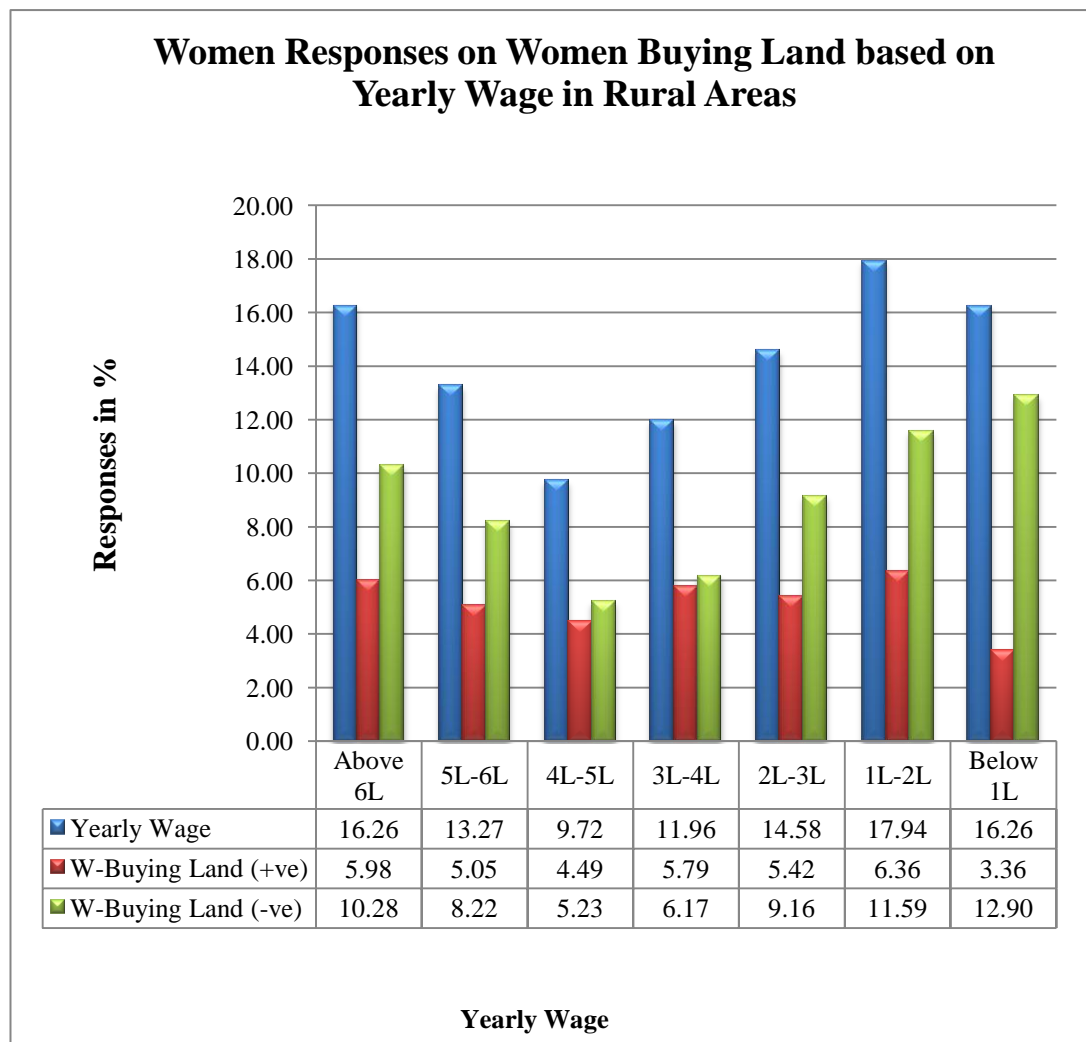


Source: Field survey of the study area.

The above graph shows the women responses if they will buy land with their yearly wage in the urban area. The women gave positive responses with the wage ranging from 8Lakhs to above 12Lakhs. They considered themselves to be capable enough that they can buy land provided the ultimate decision will be taken by the male member of the family. On the other hand, wage range between 8Lakhs to below 2Lakhs have given negative responses that they won't buy land with their wage. Because they considered their salary to be very less to buy land. Moreover, they don't want to buy land because they don't want to have negative relationship with the male member of the family by claiming or owning land of her own.

According to a woman respondent from Chirang: “Haa bainangwo babw, nokhorni houaa phwrni khwtha baarnw haya jwng henjo phwra”. It means- Even though we want to buy land, still we are being a woman can’t overhear the commands of the male member of the family.

Figure no. 4.2.4.4: Responses on women buying land based on yearly wage in rural areas.



Source: Field survey of the study area.

The above graph shows the women responses if they will buy land with their yearly wage in the rural area. The women gave maximum negative responses of all the wage range. They considered themselves to be incapable of buying because of

the fewer wages. Negative responses were there because they considered their salary to be very less to buy land. Moreover, they don't want to buy land because they don't want to have negative relationship with the male member of the family by claiming or owning land of her own. It is interesting to note that it was from the rural area where the women wanted to have land as their identity, but when it comes to buying land of her own, they gave mostly negative responses that they don't want to buy land. The responsible reason was less income, and disagreement from the society as well as family members.

*According to a rural woman from Udalguri: "Haa bainw toh gsw, nathai phwisa gwiya majwng bainw? Ang nathai lugwiw henjao pwhra haa bhaag ni mwnthai dong. Phipha ni phrai babw phisai ni phrai babw. Arw jai henjao aa sakri dong biswr gaoni gotho saa phwrni thakai babw haa bai nanwi dwn nangwo". It means- I wish to buy land of my own but I am financially broke, how am I supposed to buy. Yet I want women must get the women and land ownership may it be through parental or husbands. And those ladies who are engaged in job, they must buy land atleast for their future generation.*

#### **4.3. POLITICAL OR LEGAL FACTOR**

A community is one which is framed, processed, formed and functions by the amalgamation and collaboration of several societies in various grounds. The framework of a community was never away from the social structure and its various stratifications. Once the portrayal of society is set, it automatically includes the other aspects such as population, settlements, ethnicity, culture, identity, status, economy, politics and administration and also developmental activities over years.

Whenever the concept of socio-political aspects is concentrated the very first point that it highlights is the social condition and political administration in an area, state, country and the world. The second notable point is the social and cultural situation of the people out of the political activities and functions, as politics plays a vital role in determining the people and their rights. When the society and societal

structure is highly influenced by the political affairs, then it has both positive and negative impact. The positive impact possibly leads to have a better governance and control over the public resources. The lists of negative impacts would be more than that of the positive because of the issues that every individual has with the governing bodies in the form of identity, status, economic crisis and other individual or community level developmental activities.

The scenario from the gendered perspective in terms of socio-political condition mainly deals with the concern of gender-based inequality and discrimination that is done based on gender which is socially constructed as well as sexes which is on the other hand scientifically constructed. While considering gender, the term not only confine itself within the perspective of male/men and female/women, rather it also brings together the concept of LGBTQ i.e. lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer section of the society. It is very recent in India when the gender-based discrimination or even the issues are being discussed in a public level and being talked in the parliament. But still the tradition of discrimination and bias behaviour towards the LGBTQ section prevails in every corner and locality not only in the entire country but the world.

As per the title of the topic is concern, it confines within the perspective of the status of Bodo women in Bodoland Territorial Area Districts that is being influenced by the socio-political condition prevailing in the locality. Here, the topic highlights the condition of Bodo women in the locality and the influence of the prevalence of unrest situation in the B.T.A.D.

#### **4.3.1. Rights and Liberty in Terms of Land Owning**

The Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (B.T.A.D.) covers the Bodo dominated four districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri of Assam. The Geographical location and Political boundaries consist with West Bengal in the west of Kokrajhar district as well as the international boundary with Bhutan in the entire study area of B.T.A.D. Kokrajhar is the headquarter of B.T.A.D. and all the

administrative head offices are located here. The district of Chirang and Baksa has a mixture of various communities especially Bengali, Koch Rajbangsi and also the other religious groups. The district of Udalguri has the major influence of Assamese culture among the Bodos. Society and its structure of any community have a strong reflectance of its social activities, cultural representation, political identities and technological development. The general overview of the socio-political scenario of B.T.A.D. has always been portrait as one of the most disputed areas. Its strong influence is not only being witnessed among the Bodos but also the other communities too creating chaos and unrest situation.

The socio-cultural tradition of the community has been through several changes since the past, being influenced by both the norms of patriarchy and modernisation which in both ways the presence of gender biasness and some proportion of equality in minor cases. Women being influenced by patriarchy, it also affects its social structure thereby creating unbalanced, bias and disparity between men and women in all social, political and economic aspects based on gender. Such practices create uncertainty for the future of Bodo women and the community in general.

The Bodos were a warrior community group, for them the fight for their territory in relation to their identity as their right was and still the prime factor for their existence. The women of the Bodo community too used to be a strong support of shield and power during their historical wars. Still in the present-day context the strength of the Bodo women is worth mentioning. In general, the status of the women in the community is not different from other tribal communities of Northeast India. The community has been through several social, cultural, economic as well as political changes over the years. During such changes, the influence of both patriarchy in one hand and modernisation in the other has its full impact. Apart from that the changing social patterns influenced by the mixing of neighbouring communities also has its influence in changed status of the women.

The rate of change in the overall condition of the women section is rapid and transitional over certain phases of time, but the maximum control of the community

is on the hands of the men. The first phase includes the involvement of women in minor family decisions, but the maximum share goes to the counter men folk. The second phase includes having right and ownership in certain mortal properties including the share of rice production, fruits, vegetables etc. The third phase which incorporates with the influence of modern lifestyle and developmental activities providing better education facilities and right to work in the public sectors such as teaching profession, marketing and sellers, business and trade of hand weaved traditional dresses and handicrafts etc. Then it comes in the present-day context of Bodo women and her identity in the field of politics and administration. Mrs. Pramila Rani Brahma and Dr. Anjali Daimari are the best example of developing status of Bodo women.

The status of women is not equal to everyone; it varies from section, region and economic as well as political background. The region of B.T.A.D. is always in a situation of unrest and unstable in its political point of view. The existing politics and the governance have a strong impact on the social and cultural lives of the commons. The region is highly disputed and very sensitive which sometimes have even ended up in having communal clash and riots. In such a situation, the prime focus firstly goes to the strategies to bring peace in the region at the earliest. In such a process, the questions of women safety, status and rights have always remained unanswered and ultimately get forgotten by time.

The government is giving several incentives to the women section to develop their own identity through their skills. But the fulfilment of those incentives also demands some amount of women's enthusiasm to be fruitful. The problem not just revolves around the ignorance of the government, but also the women are unaware of their rights and equal status in the society. The women themselves to certain extend are responsible enough of their ignored status due to their ignorance. Again, certain loopholes of being unable to form strong groups for demanding their rights and equal status that deals with the society as well as the prevailing situations in the region.

Bodo women are blessed with the skill of weaving and handicrafts. Earlier times, they used to make it for their personal consumption but at present, the Bodo

Dokhona (Bodo traditional dress of women) has been recognised internationally. The skills of the women has a source to provide a brighter future and broader vision of development of not just women but the community. Here the political aspects have given a platform in the form of govt. programmes and incentives to develop weaving as a part of several recognised Self-Help Groups. The Handicraft industry known as BRAWFED (Bodoland Regional Apex Weavers & Artisans Cooperative Federation Ltd.) is an organisation through which the government has provided scope to develop the skills of the women as well as develop their own identity establishing their status in a public commercial world.

The society always plays a vital role in determining the status of women in a community in public sectors. In the Bodo community, as a tribal community it did not used to have certain systems of recognition based on gender. But with due course of time and acceptance of Hindu Law Act and other factors of influence from different communities' changes took place to certain extend. Such a change has both positive and negative impact, which has been discussed above.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

#### **5.1 IMPACT OF WOMEN AND LAND RIGHTS**

There are various impacting factors related to women and land rights. Such as the consequences of giving women a land right, rather it will help the women sect to develop equally, or it will create more inequality and change in the traditional practise of Bodo land holding system. As per the data collected from the study area, it has been found that the male is giving better response to the concept of women and land rights than female respondents. The male responses are more positive and welcoming because in that way the community will become more equally developed and sound without any gender biasness.

Some of the positive impact on women through land rights-

- 1) It provides safety and security to the women to run in the society.
- 2) It supports the families which are led by a single woman.
- 3) I act as a source of framing their own identity in the society without the help of anyone behind.
- 4) It gives confidence to the women to actively participate in any decision making of their family, village and community.
- 5) It brings equal development among the genders and brings sustainability and balance in a male dominant society.

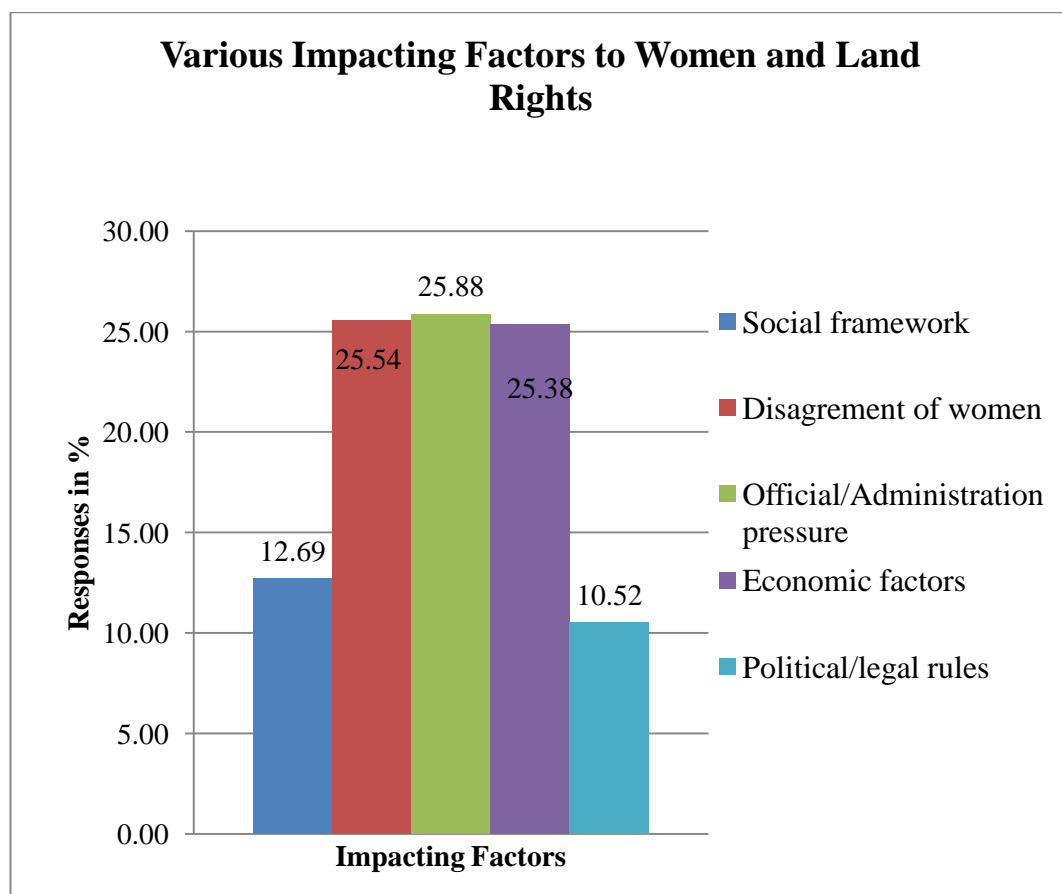
Besides the positive impacts there are some negative impacts of women on land rights as indicated by the studies are

- 1) There will be a chance of women becoming more dominant upon the society in general.
- 2) Traditional practices will be changed and hence endangered.
- 3) Customary practices and values will be questioned by the younger generation.

4) Contradiction the acceptance of new land holding rules by the older generation.

5) It can bring gender-based conflict of ideologies on land rights.

Figure No. 5.1.1: Histogram of various impacting factors to women and land rights.



Source: Field survey of the study area.

The above histogram shows the various impacting factors to women and land rights in the study. The histogram has been prepared based on the data collected from the study area. Here the histogram clearly shows the obstacles of Bodo women that she has to face in regard to owning land rights.

The impacting factors such as official/administration pressure has recorded highest share. The reason behind it was the study area was having more rural areas comprising of max population concentrated in the villages. Due to the less educational facilities the people of the study area are not able to acquire adequate

knowledge. As the respondents are not educationally sound and has less knowledge about the office related works. Thus, the women find it difficult to reach till the office for claiming of land and do land related works. The treatments given by the officials in the offices to the rural people and the misbehaviour is the other most rated reason for the women to reach the office. The second highest recorded factor is the disagreement of women that they themselves do not want to have land of their own. The women do not want to have land or do not want to buy land because they do not find it practical to dream about owning land. The women especially in the rural areas consider of being incapable of holding and handling land. Thus, the women disagree to have land or buy land. The third highest factor was the economic factor. Many of the women were not economically or financially sound that they can think of buying land. As many of the women respondents were educationally sound, thus they are also financially in the weaker hand. Because of which neither they think of inheriting land nor desires of buying their own land. Though, women from financially weaker family who are driven by poverty wanted to have their own land so that they can become stable in life and can provide life safety and identity to their next generation.

Other impacting factors are social framework and political rules. Here the social framework or the socially constructed male dominant society has always been a reason for women's drawback. The society and the social structure are not flexible for the women to develop in a patriarchal society. Still in the recent times, there were several reformations have been made for the equal rights and liberty of the women. Though in the rural areas, a woman cannot go beyond the societal rules framed by the dominant sect. Lastly, the political or legal rules are the impacting factors because of lack of legal knowledge very often women lack to attain their rights.

## **5.2 FINDINGS**

The entire study associated to Bodo women and land rights intended to have a detailed study about various related factors. Such as the population distribution, education, women education and access to economic activities, political aspects, role

of women in decision making, etc. the study has mainly focused in the traditional and modern system of land holding practised in the Bodo community, women and extent of property rights, women and land rights, etc. Along with the other related factors, the changes in women and extent of property rights in the present, the positive and negative factors of giving women the land rights, etc has been the prime focus. All the data collected and analysed was based on the field survey in the study of the four districts of B.T.A.D. namely Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri districts of Assam.

The system of holding land has a detailed and delegate process to go through in which obstacles and uncertain situations are faced. In general circumstances, traditionally in the Bodo community land was not given to the women for ownership. Even now such practise of restricted women and land ownership is practised in the study area. As mentioned, and discussed in the prior chapters, that in certain conditions the practise of giving a portion of land to a woman has been found in the community. Those circumstances are as i) marriage- during the marriage of daughter, the women were given a piece of land as a gift from the father as a token of love and security. The sense of one's dearness between a father and daughter still depends upon certain factors. Such as available land, agreement with the other male siblings and most important is the behaviour of the daughter with the parents and fellow siblings. Only if these factors are fulfilled, then only the girl will be given a portion of land. ii) The second circumstance is a widowed woman- after loss of husband's life it's the only women left in the in-law's place where there is a possibility of being either treated properly or badly treated by the in-laws. Depending on the fact that, if the widowed woman has a child, either a boy or girl, then the in-laws will give the part of land of her husband. In such case, the land will be given in the name of the child in general and not to the widowed mother. The land will be given on the name of women only if she has a good terms and suitable behaviour with the in-laws.

These were the two main conditions based on which a woman was given the authority to hold a land in both parental as well as in-laws place. In the above discussion it has been found that the ultimate decision taken by the parents or in-laws is based upon the behaviour of the women. Apart from that the decision which was

taken of whether to give the land or not is totally based upon the male member of the family. In the prior chapter it has been thoroughly discussed about the role of women in the family and village in terms of decision making. There it has been found that the women hardly had any role to play in terms of decision making. The case of land holding does not even come to the scene in terms of discussing it with the female member of the family. The sole decision of whether to give the land or not, which part is supposed to be given and how much portion is supposed to be given is all decided by the male member of the family. It is very saddening to observe that, in the current 2024-2025 itself the same role is played by the women in terms of discussion about land. Still in the present-day context as well, the decision of giving or not giving land to the women is decided by the male member of the family.

In such a case, the question of choosing does not even arise for the women whether she has anything to say about the share portion and value of land while giving it to the female. Instances have also come upon that the women have been given such a portion of land by her father or brothers or uncles or in-laws who are inaccessible or valueless. Without a doubt, in the eyes of the world she has been gifted with the authority to hold land but the quality, value and accessibility to that land seems to be moreover poor in general. In the rural areas, the land which is fertile and has any accessibility to reach is more valued. Land in the rural areas are meant for agricultural activities. If the land is not fertile, no agricultural activities can be done because the production will be less. Investing labour and money in an infertile land means investment will go in vain.

*According to an anonymous woman respondent from the study area-*

*1) According to an anonymous woman respondent from Chirang- 'haa khwo hwdwng, nathai ang binai haa khwo hwaa khwi ada mwnha. Angnw mwnhasoaa, maojaya lujaya gami sim lama gwiwi haa khwo sw hwdwng. Be haa khwo ang lananwi ma khalamnw'? It means- the land that the woman has desired to own was not given to her. Moreover, she was given such an inaccessible, unreachable land has been given where no road is available in the remote village.*

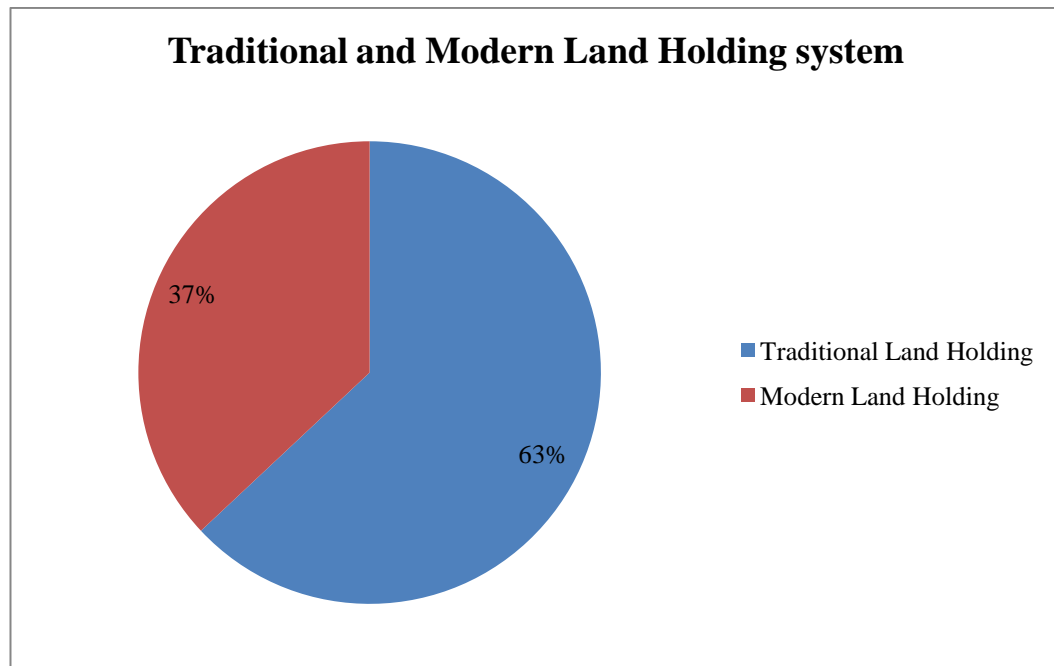
2) *According to an anonymous woman respondent from Baksa- 'ang haba jadwng town ao, Afa thwinai ni unao, ada mwnha angnw bw Afa ni haa bhaag ni phrai eese bhaag haa hwdwng. Haa ya gami ni nw, manwna Afa ya gami ao nw thaiw mwn. Nathai angnao khebse bw swnga swi de ang obe haa khwo mwnba angna mwjang jagwn hwn nanwi. Swngnai ni ongai angnw gami gudu ao dwi serni haa khwo hwdwng Ada mwnha, jerao ang jebw khwo nw khalamnw hanai nonga. Obe haa khwo swnga lasinw angnao Ada ya wrwi baidi sw bungbai de angtoh nwngrw haa khwo hwbai. Ang mwnthikhaiw nwngrw town ao sw thakhaiw nwngrw haa khwo layaba angnw nwngrw phaan phindw. Ang duku mwn nanwi haa khwo Ada nw phanphinbai'. It means- the woman was married off in the town and after the demises of her father, the brothers have decided to give a share of land to the women out of love. Moreover, the brother didn't ask which part of the land the woman wanted; instead they gave such a portion of land which is in the remote location near the river. Woman knew that she will not be able to do anything with the plot of land given by their brother. To her surprise, the brother said, I know that you stay in the town and what will you do with the land in the village. If you don't want the land, you can resell the land to me. The woman was astonished to hear the sentence of her brother. Not knowing what to do, the woman sold the plot of land to her brother.*

These are some of the instances observed during the field survey in the rural areas of the study area. There is a system of holding land by women is the land of the mother. In the Bodo community if by any means a woman is acquiring land ownership that land will have the sole control of the woman. She can either give it to her son or daughter is all decided by the woman who owns the land. The land is termed as Bima ni Haa i.e. Mother's land. While the women owner is alive, she can distribute the land to her daughters fully depending on the mood and relationship they share as mother-daughter. But after the death of the woman owning the land, if she has not distributed by her wish before she expires than the decision will be taken by either husband or sons of the family to whom the land must be given. Ultimately, if the women owning a land do not decide the next owner of the land prior to her death, then automatically the male member of the family will take over the land.

In the urban areas too such case of land holding and distribution takes place. However, in the town areas as the price of the land is expensive thus there is a new system practised by the people. The father will verbally give either a part of the house or a floor of the building to the daughter so that she can stay after her marriage. The portions are limited and based on the behaviour of the daughter. Though the portion of house is given, but no legal documentation is prepared so that the daughter can claim it after the father expires. Ultimately, the verbal words given by the father remains only till the father is alive. In such a situation the daughter is left with no guarantee or security of having that portion of house for lifetime.

In the town areas it has been found some of the land ownership is prepared in the name of the women of the household. This practise is seen among those families where both husband and wife or at least wife is engaged in a job or business. The reason behind doing such is to avail any kind of housing loan at lower interest. The other reason is the government scheme of “Apon ghar” Scheme of Assam government, where a definite amount is credited as a subsidy against the housing loan. This scheme is only meant for the woman who owns land in Assam. To avail the facility of fewer rates of interest and the government subsidy, the women are intentionally getting the land right in the town areas. Other major findings are analysed bellow by which the exact scenario of women and land rights and its associated outcomes has been discussed.

Figure no. 5.2.1: Pie Chart showing the traditional and Modern Land Holding system of the study area.



Source: Field survey of the study area.

The above pie chart shows the share of practicing traditional and modern land holding system in the study area. Here the pie graph shows that the practise of traditional system of land holding is more with 63%. It means that the community is still practicing both in rural and urban areas where land ownership is limited to men. In the traditional land holding system the owner will always remain the male member of the family in general condition. Despite all the agreements and disagreement argues and responses, the community is stick to their traditional laws and values. Here the land ownership is associated with male dominance prevailing in the Bodo community. However, the position and status of women in the Bodo community has always been among the respected one. A woman carries high respect in the community in various aspects of culture, religion, social, economic and in political backdrop too. Moreover, the share of modern adoption of land holding is also rising in the days to come with 37%. Here the modern system of land holding means more flexibility in terms of land holding. Here the decision of women in terms of choosing

land is more dominantly visible. The role of women in terms of economic and social flexibility is more practised in the modern land holding system. In this system the women get more access to own land ownership and utilise it as her identity in the society. May be the ownership is given or taken by the women intentionally so as to avail certain benefits of the government schemes as well as the facilities of the bank.

Table no. 5.2.1: Urban male and female positive response to Women and Land Rights district wise using Sopher's Disparity Index.

DISTRICTS	M+ve (x2)	F+ve (x1)	log X2/X1	100- X2	100-X1	log 100- X1/100- X2	D=log X2/X1+ log 100- X1/100- X2
Kokrajhar	76.88	68.03	0.053	23.120	31.970	0.141	0.194
Chirang	72.76	61.59	0.072	27.240	38.410	0.149	0.222
Baksa	73.84	58.93	0.098	26.160	41.070	0.196	0.294
Udalguri	73.19	63.32	0.063	26.810	36.680	0.136	0.199

Source: Field survey of the study area.

The above table was prepared from the data collected from the study area to see the disparity among the male and female in terms of women and land rights. As the area was urban, expected response was supposed to have more positive response from the female, but the male gave more positive response in compared to female. It means in the urban areas the male population are educated and more understanding about the current equality scenario of genders. Thus, the male population has given more positive response than female about the women and land rights. Male wants or agrees to give equal rights to women in terms of holding land. There could be other possible reason than just being educated. The other reason could be the facilities associated with the government schemes given to the women landowners. To avail such schemes also the male has given more positive response to woman and land rights. Despite the schemes also male member of the family wants to equal

development of the female member of the family to equally be able to run the family with high expense in the town areas.

Moreover, the reason behind female giving less positive response is because the female do not want to get extra burden of office works in relation to land holding. Many of the female in the town areas were working women. They had to deal with the family chores as well as office works at the same time. They did not want any more burden of office related work. However, the female who gave positive response to women and land rights are majorly office workers with significantly high salary. That female has also given positive response to buying land with their salary. This shows the positive energy of the women to equally develop and create a specific position in the society. In the prior chapter the responses of women in terms of buying land in both rural and urban areas has been already discussed.

Table no. 5.2.2: Urban male and female negative response to Women and Land Rights district wise using Sopher's Disparity Index.

DISTRICTS	F-ve (x2)	M-ve (x1)	log X2/X1	100- X2	100- X1	log 100- X1/100- X2	D=log X2/X1+log 100- X1/100-X2
Kokrajhar	61.78	40.23	0.186	38.220	59.770	0.194	0.380
Chirang	65.45	42.54	0.187	34.550	57.460	0.221	0.408
Baksa	55.26	45.17	0.088	44.740	54.830	0.088	0.176
Udalguri	51.22	38.92	0.119	48.780	61.080	0.098	0.217

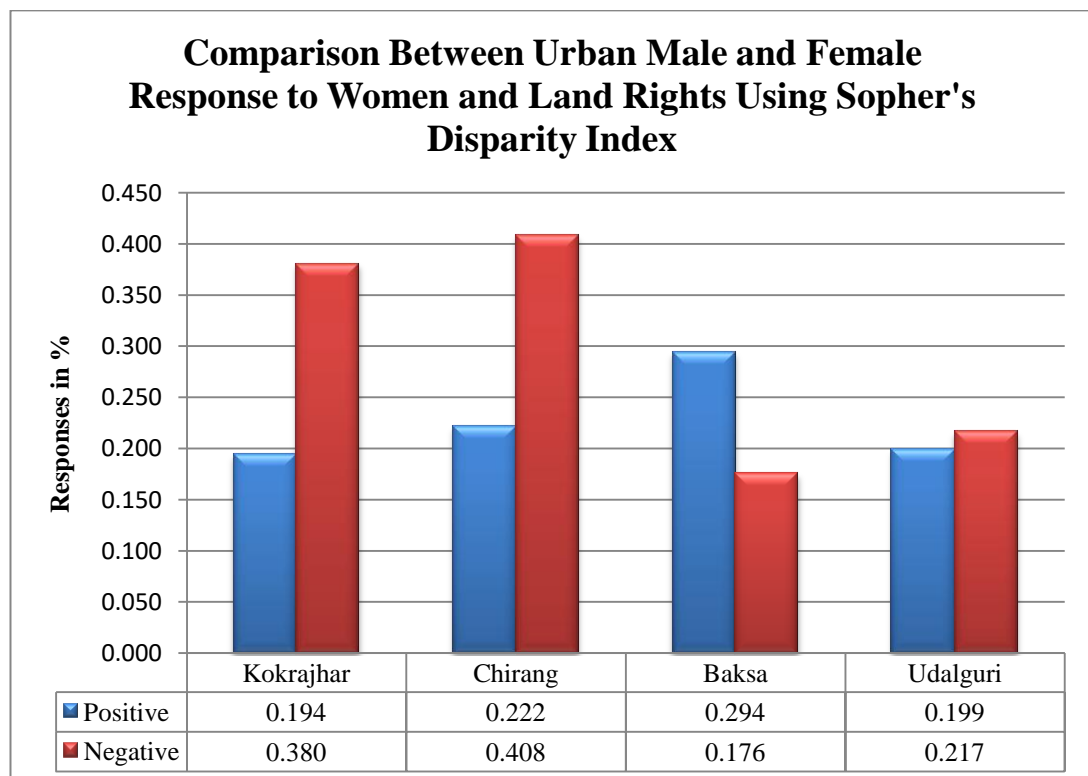
Source: Field survey of the study area.

The above table shows the disparity in the negative responses of women and men in terms of women and land rights. Here based on the prior table, this current table is reversed in terms of negative responses. Here the female gave more responses to women and land rights than male. The possible reason given by the women were educationally sound to face the officers of land revenue department. Other possible reason was being afraid of the society and the system that will not

accept the concept of women holding a land. Thus, the female does not want to dream bigger than they can acquire. Another most important reason was unemployment of women. As the women were unemployed, they do not have the financial position as well as mental condition to even think of owning land ownership.

On the other hand, male responses were less in terms of being negative in relation to women and land rights. The reason was the male wanted the female to equally establish and equally tackle the situations related to the office work. The male wanted the female to be more independent so that they can handle the situation more bravely. Thus, the male responses from the study area were less negative.

Figure no.: 5.2.2: Bar Graph showing the comparison between Urban Male and Female Response to Women and Land Rights using Sopher's Disparity Index of the study area.



Source: Field survey of the study area.

The disparity index was calculated using Sopher's disparity index in which the differences between the male and female responses has been found. To visually display the calculation the above bar diagram has been prepared to compare the negative positive response in the urban areas in terms of women and land rights. The calculation shows that the district of Chirang has more disparity between female and male responses. The difference is high because the female of that district gave more negative answer than positive in terms of women and land right. The reason was that among female there was high lack of education, unemployment, lack of financial stability and unwanted extra load of office work. The district of Kokrajhar and Udalguri has relatively less difference. The reason was more access to education, more financial stability, and more engagement in economic activities and will to equally develop in the society and development the community. The district of Baksa has the least disparity between male and female response because both male and female gave equal share of negative responses. Both the gender do not want to engage in the concept of women and land rights. The reason of having such idea is the lack of education, less social awareness, remoteness from the developed areas in the study area.

In the case of positive disparity Kokrajhar has the least disparity. It is because the district is the head quarter of B.T.C. and both male and female wants to have security of life and liberty. As many of the female there were working thus the female as well as male gave more positive response to women and land rights. The population in that area were more aware and prominent in terms of availing more freedom may it be male or female. In the district of Kokrajhar both the male and the female want to develop equally and acquire more security of life in the society. Thus, Kokrajhar has the least positive disparity. The districts of Chirang and Udalguri have moderate disparity. Whereas Baksa has maximum difference in the positive response in terms of women and land rights.

Table no. 5.2.3: Rural male and female positive response to Women and Land Rights district wise using Sopher's Disparity Index.

DISTRICTS	F+ve (x2)	M+ve (x1)	log X2/X1	100- X2	100- X1	log 100- X1/100- X2	D=log X2/X1+1 og 100- X1/100- X2
Kokrajhar	64.58	45.17	0.155	35.420	54.830	0.190	0.345
Chirang	58.72	48.69	0.081	41.280	51.310	0.094	0.176
Baksa	69.52	50.66	0.137	30.480	49.340	0.209	0.347
Udalguri	68.32	53.24	0.108	31.680	46.760	0.169	0.277

Source: Field survey of the study area.

The above table is the calculation to see the disparity among the male female positive response to women and land rights. The calculation has been done using the Sopher's disparity index. Here in the calculation, it has been found that in Kokrajhar and Baksa female gave more positive response than male thus disparity is high between the gender because in the village women wants to develop but male don't want female to be more independent or over headed. The male wants to have the controlling hand over the female in terms of land holding. This type of mentality is because of over population, lack of education, lack of recourses and fear of being dominated by female. Here the influence from other community such as Assamese, Bengali, Nepali, Bihari, Marwari, etc. these community has more influence because of the population size of these communities are more in the districts of Kokrajhar and Baksa. Among these communities, the female does not have much role to play in independence, because they have the concept of having men as the main worker and earner of the family.

Udalguri has moderate disparity because both male and female have given similar share of positive response to women and land rights. Chirang has recorded least disparity because both male and female wants to have equal development and security of life. The male and female gave more positive answer which has brought the disparity index to the least.

Table no. 5.2.4: Rural male and female negative response to Women and Land Rights district wise using Sopher's Disparity Index.

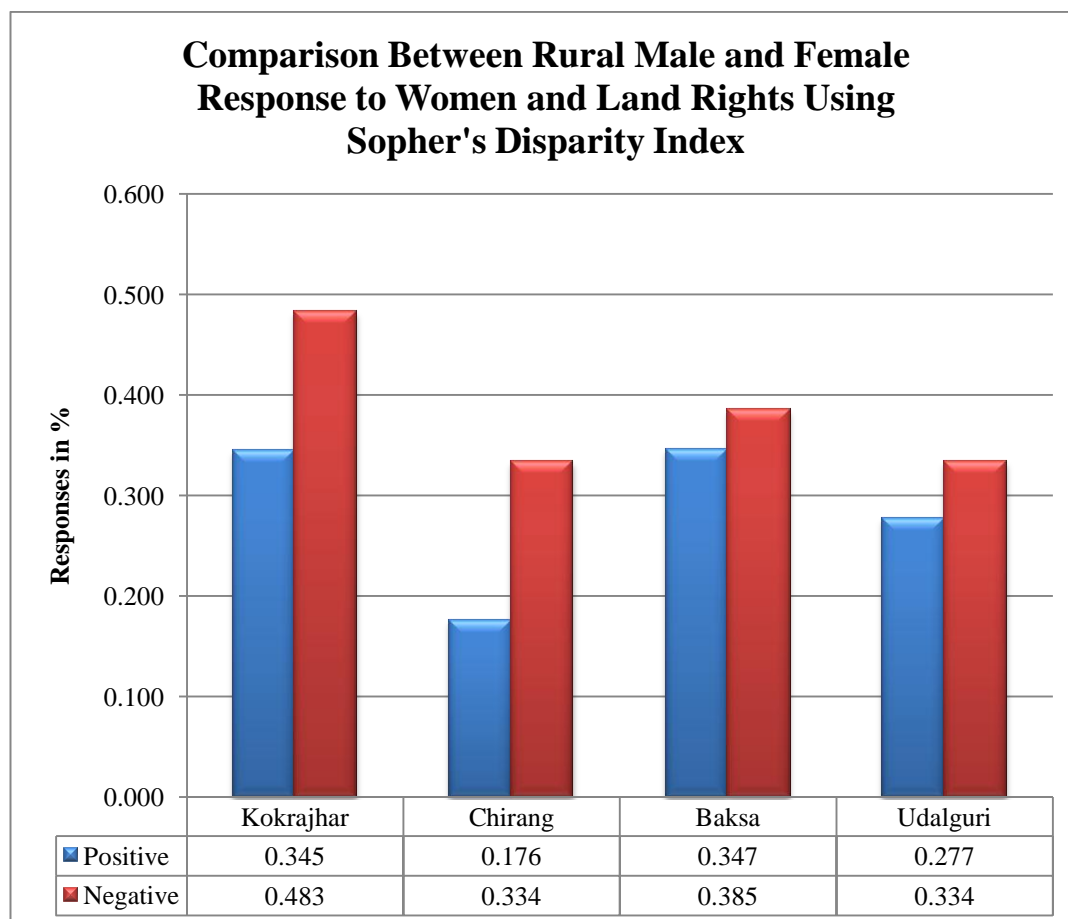
DISTRICT	M-ve (x2)	F-ve (x1)	log X2/X1	100-X2	100-X1	log 100- X1/100 -X2	D=log X2/X1+1 og 100- X1/100- X2
Kokrajhar	73.21	47.35	0.189	26.790	52.650	0.293	0.483
Chirang	68.92	50.67	0.134	31.080	49.330	0.201	0.334
Baksa	72.1	51.55	0.146	27.900	48.450	0.240	0.385
Udalguri	67.86	49.47	0.137	32.140	50.530	0.197	0.334

Source: Field survey of the study area.

The above table is the calculation to see the disparity among the male female negative response to women and land rights. The calculation has been done using the Sopher's disparity index. Kokrajhar has recorded high disparity in the rural areas because the male gave more negative response to women and land rights. On the other hand, female gave less negative response to women and land rights. Thus, the disparity in terms of negative response between the two genders in relation to women and land ownership is the highest. The reason behind having highest disparity has been already discussed in the prior table. The male in the rural areas don't want to give the access of land holding to the women.

Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri have similar disparity index in terms of negative response to women and land rights. The disparity is less in Chirang is because the share of negative response given by male and female are nearly equal. Some portion of the people of Chirang and Udalguri in both male and female equally said they don't need women and land rights, which is complete reserve to the previous table. Moreover, the district of Baksa has the second highest disparity because the female gave less negative response to women and land rights in the rural areas.

Figure no.: 5.2.3: Bar Graph showing the comparison between Rural Male and Female Response to Women and Land Rights using Sopher's Disparity Index

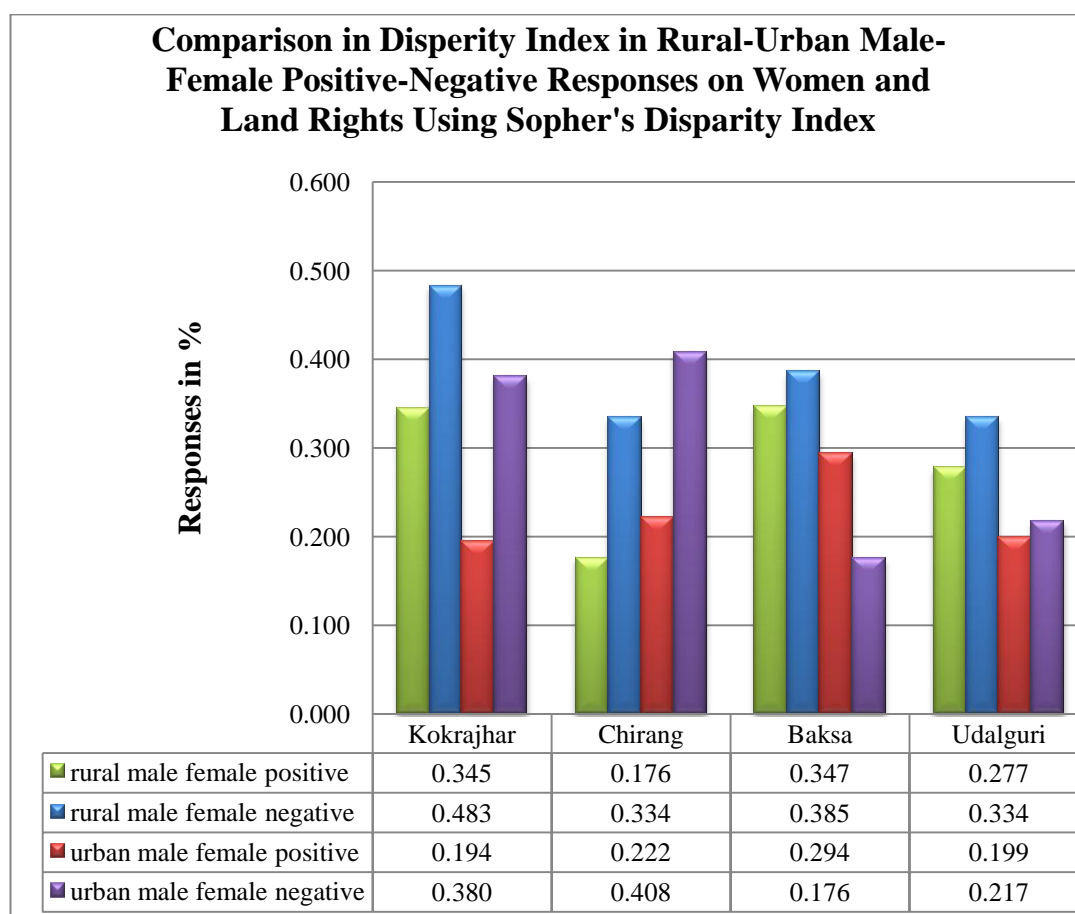


Source: Field survey of the study area.

The above bar graph has been prepared out of the data collected from the study area after disparity calculation using Sopher's disparity index. Here the visual interpretation of the above two table has been done for better understanding. Here it can be easily understood that there is a high disparity in the thought process of male and female in all the districts of the study area. Kokrajhar being the head quarter of B.T.C. records highest negative as well as positive disparity responses by male and female in relation to women and land rights. In the rural areas women to have more freedom to land ownership. But the male member does not want to give the access of owning land. Similar is the case in high and low for the other districts as well. The female wants to have the access to land rights to attain development and security of

life. Because in the rural areas the life is difficult especially for a single mother or woman. The world becomes a horrible place for single women without property and identity. Thus, after looking into the difficulties and life struggle, women want to have access to land ownership to be legally available for each and every woman.

Figure no.: 5.2.4: Bar graph showing Comparison in Disparity Index in Rural-Urban Male-Female Positive-Negative Responses on Women and Land Rights using Sopher's Disparity Index



Source: Field survey of the study area.

The above graph is the overall comparison between disparity index in the rural-urban, male-female and their positive-negative responses. The graph is prepared out with the compilation of the prior calculation done by using Sopher's disparity index.

### **5.3 SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

From all the analysis, observation and discussion that has been compiled in this thesis the suggestion and recommendations to uplift the concern topic are-

- 1) There is an urgent need for proper education for overall development.
- 2) Time to time awareness programs be conducted for both men and women regarding their rights, equality and liberty.
- 3) The society requires a sound understanding about balancing gender issues and the benefit of it.
- 4) Womenfolk be it a mother, Sisters, Aunts, Wife must first understand the sensitivity of the gender issue and educate their children and younger generations about the fairer world and society.
- 5) The government and various women and child development departments must come up to the grass root level till the primary schools to provide knowledge about gender equality.

### **5.4 LIMITATION OF THE RESEARCH**

- The data collection was highly interrupted because of COVID-19.
- Due to COVID-19 the Google form questionnaires were used to collect data, which had limited exposure to the respondents. Only the technologically equipped and respondents from younger age group could be able to respond.
- During the data collection, respondent was hesitant to give information regarding their land and property.
- Respondents especially female were not willing to put up their opinions considering their responses might go wrong.

- 27<sup>th</sup> Jan 2020 Third Bodo Peace agreement of territorial reformation of B.T.A.D to B.T.R. and its agenda on land delineation has disturbed the opinion of the Bodo people, hampering in data collection.

### **5.5 SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

- The study has the scope to be explored further in terms of co-relating the factors of sustainability with women and land rights.
- It also carries the scope to analyse the variable of rural and urban scenario and its direct influence upon women and land rights in the community.
- As a strategy, in a grassroots level plans should be made to not just creating awareness but to awaken the women regarding their rights in collaboration with various organisations so that the gap of gender inequality does not widen. Simultaneously the policy making of the government should be strongly implemented.

### **5.6 SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH**

The research carried out with a motive of presenting the real ground experience of women in the Bodo community in relation to women and land rights. The research intentionally covered both the rural and urban areas of the study area to cover the maximum information related to the topic. While covering the study area several instances and incidences came on the way, providing more exposure related to the topic. Along with the mainstream topic of women and land rights many gender-based sub factors appeared.

In this research after all the analysis, discussion and arguments the outcome has come up that the key to equalise and balance any issue is through equal efforts from all the genders. It will work through improvement in education will improve the minds of the people. The people's mind is the one which creates the society. To

attain equality in each and every aspect, the society must be laid out with the equal hands of all the gender.

The research here summarises with the note that the Bodo community and its traditional land holding system which has been carried out since years, can be carried out in future as well. Provided the society must be flexible and access to the women to express their choices in selecting the best for them as well as the community.

## Photo gallery

Kokrajhar District Survey Photo Plates.



Plate no. 3.1.: Discussion on Bodo Tradition with the Priest of Ultapani, Kokrajhar.



Plate no. 3.2.: Data Collection, Kokrajhar.



Plate no. 3.3.: On the way to Saralpara for data collection along with the faculty of Geography Department, Kokrajhar Govt. College, Kokrajhar.



Plate no. 3.4.: Crossing River to collect data from Assam-West Bengal Border at Sankosh river, Kokrajhar.



Plate no. 3.5.: Survey with the Bodo women selling Dokhona, Kokrajhar.



Plate no. 3.6.: Data collection from Secretariat office of Bodoland Territorial Council along with the students and faculty of Kokrajhar Govt. College, Kokrajhar.

Chirang District Survey Photo Plates.



Plate no. 3.7.: Approaching to the remote Bodo village in



Plate no. 3.8.: Survey with Dokhona seller from Chirang District in National Handloom Expo, conducted at Kokrajhar.



Plate no. 3.9.: Survey with the vegetable sellers at Boro Bazar, Chirang.



Plate no. 3.10.: Survey data collection in one of the village, Chirang.



Plate no.: 3.11.: Survey data collection in one of the village, Chirang.



Plate no. 3.12.: crossing river to reach the last Bodo village towards North border, Chirang.

Baksa District Survey Photo Plates.



Plate no. 3.13.: Survey data collection, Baksa.



Plate no. 3.16.: Survey data collection, Baksa.



Plate no. 3.14.: Survey data collection, Baksa.



Plate no. 3.17.: Survey with one of the Woman in the village of Baksa.



Plate no. 3.15.: Survey data collection in the local market of Baksa.



Plate no. 3.18.: Survey with the woman and man in one village, Baksa.

Udalguri District Survey Photo Plates.



Plate no. 3.19.: Image of Dhansiri river power project observed while collecting data at Bhairabkunda, Udalguri.



Plate no. 3.22.: Data collection in one of the village in Dhamdhama, Udalguri.



Plate no. 3.20.: Image of Dhansiri power project at Bhairabkunda where Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Bhutan meet in one point, Udalguri.



Plate no. 3.23.: Data collection in a tea stall in remote North border of Udalguri.

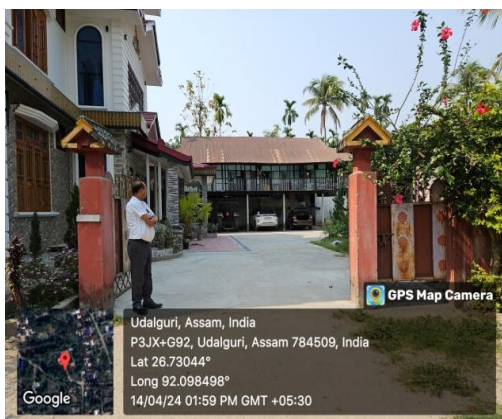


Plate no. 3.21.: Household where data was collected in the towns of Udalguri.

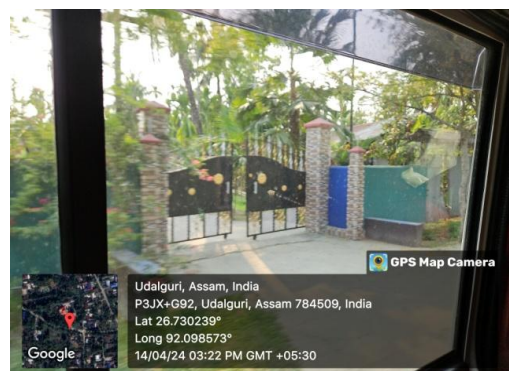


Plate no. 3.24.: Image captured after data collection because the honour was not allowing taking pictures, Udalguri.

Plates related to Bodo Community and the regular tasks of Bodo Women.



Plate no. 4.2.1.25.: Traditional economic activity of collecting fire wood from forest by women.



Plate no. 4.2.2.28.: Traditional as well as modern economic activities of weaving.



Plate no. 4.2.1.26.: Traditional as well as modern economic activities of rice cultivation by Bodo women.



Plate no. 4.2.2.29.: Traditional as well as modern economic activities of vegetable selling by Bodo women.



Plate no. 4.2.1.27.: Traditional as well as modern economic activities of silk raising.



Plate no. 3.6.3.B. 30.: Bodo dance Dahal Thungri.



Plate no. 3.6.3.B.31.: Bodo musical instruments and traditional dress.



Plate no. 3.7.35.: Discussion of the family and participation of women in the discussion.



Plate no. 3.6.5.B.32.: Bodo tools and art & craft.



Plate no. 3.6.5.B.36: Bakhri means traditional rice store house.



Plate no. 4.1.2.33.: Performance of Brahma religion.



Plate no. 3.6.5.B.37: Women preparing local rice beer in a traditional process.



Plate no. 4.1.1.34.: Marriage of Bodo couple by Brahma Dharma process.

Library visit in different educational Institution for secondary data collection.



Krishnakanta Handiqui Library, Gauhati University.



Rajib Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh Central Library.



Central Library, Sikkim University.



Nagaland University Central Library, Nagaland.



Daulat Ram College, during Seminar presentation and Library visit, Delhi University.

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## **Appendix- 1**

Questionnaire for the field survey of the study area.

### **WOMEN AND LAND RIGHTS IN NORTH EAST INDIA: A STUDY ON THE BODO COMMUNITY OF ASSAM**

Dear Respondent,

I am a bonafied Ph.D. Research Scholar working for the topic “WOMEN AND LAND RIGHTS IN NORTH EAST INDIA: A STUDY ON THE BODO COMMUNITY OF ASSAM” under the Supervision of Prof. Lanusashi Longkumer, Department of Geography, Nagaland University, Lumami campus headquarter.

In this connection I will be obliged to get some information from you. I will strictly maintain academic norms keeping confidentiality wherever needed as per the wishes of the respondent and will give due credit wherever needed and your kind cooperation and help will be highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,  
Sumi Narzary,  
Address: Department of Geography,  
Nagaland University, Lumami. Contact: 8133037890.

#### **Group- ‘A’ village/community head**

1. Name of respondent:

Age:                      Gender:                      Education qualification:  
Employment status- (Yes/ No):                      Occupation (if any):

2. Address:

Gram Panchayat/Municipal Ward:  
Block:                      District:                      Pin code:  
State:                      Adjacent boundary with:

3. Year of establishment of the village:

4. Total geographical area:

5. Total agricultural land of the village:

6. Total area under forest cover:

7. Total area under fallow land:

8. Total Population: (i) Male: (ii) Female:

(iii) below 12 years:

9. How many households are there in the village/town?

.....

10. Do all the families belong to Bodo community? (Yes/ No) If no, then what is the approximate number?

.....

11. What is the average education?

.....

12. Is there any primary/ secondary/ high school/ higher secondary/ college/ university in the village/town? yes/no. If yes, how many schools are there and in which medium?

**i) English ii) Assamese iii) Bengali iv) Bodo v) Others.**

.....

13. Main Occupation/ source of income of the villagers/town?

.....

14. What is the source of drinking water? Is there pipeline connectivity?

.....

15. Which are the nearest towns/cities from the village/town?

.....

16. What is the mode of connectivity of the village with the outside world?

.....

17. Is there an electricity connection? :- yes/no.

18. Whether women are part of the decision making body in the village? If yes, what percentage? If no, then why?

.....

19. Who nominate/ select/ elect the council members? What is the duration?

.....

20. Is there any change in land holding and management in the village as per the government acts? If yes, please specify.

.....

21. Do you feel the need of changes in the present land holding system for the development?

.....

REMARKS:-

**Group- 'B' Individual respondent**

**SOCIAL SYSTEMS, CUSTOMS AND LAND**

22. Which type of social system is there in the village/town especially among the Bodos?

.....

23. In the traditional Bodo social customs was there any differences based on gender in decision making?

.....

24. Is there any influence of different customs belonging to other community?

.....

25. (i) Is there any influence of the introduction of Sanskrit and Hindu Law in the tribal life of Bodos since the origin till date? (Yes/ No)

.....

(ii) If yes, what changes do you see in the customary practises and laws in the community as well as village/town?

.....

(iii) If yes, do you think that fact has any influence in decision making in the community? Please specify.

.....

REMARKS:-

### **WOMEN-LAND RIGHTS AND PROPERTY RELATIONS**

26. How important a land is for an individual Bodo?

.....

27. Do the village also have community land system along with personal land? (Yes/ No). If yes, what is the purpose? Are women allowed to use the land? Please specify.

.....

28. What is the traditional land holding system in the community and village/town?

.....

29. Is the present practise traditional or modified? If modified, what are the factors responsible for the changes in the system? Please specify.

.....

30. What is the status of Bodo women in general and in the village/town?

.....

31. What do you think about women and their education?

.....

32. Is there any change in the status of women? Please specify.

.....

33. i) In the past, were women given the right to hold land ownership? (Yes/ No). If no, then why? Please explain.

.....

ii) In the present, do you think women can hold land ownership (buy/given land)? (Yes/No). If yes, can her land be considered and accepted as her identity? Please explain.

.....

34. What are the criteria to be fulfilled for allowing women's right to land?

.....

35. What could be the possible obstacles for women to have land ownership?

.....

36. What possible consequences you see if women are given permanent land ownership?

.....

37. What are the land ownership criteria for married/widowed women in the Bodo community and in the village/town? Please explain.

.....

38. What assets or property ownership are given to a women according to the Bodo customs?

.....

39. Do you think changing women-land relations will bring social, economic political changes in the society? Please specify

.....

40. Have you attended any awareness program and meeting about equal right to land holding, equal economic rights, social justice and human rights? If no, are you ready to attend one?

.....

REMARKS:-

## Appendix-2

Google form questionnaire for online data collection.

**WOMEN AND LAND RIGHTS IN NORTH  
EAST INDIA: A STUDY ON THE BODO  
COMMUNITY OF ASSAM**

I am Sumi Narzary, a registered Ph.D. Research Scholar, Nagaland University. The following questionnaire is formulated for collecting information based on my research work. The information will strictly maintain confidentiality with academic norms and research ethics. It will be focused for academic purpose only. Your kind cooperation and help will be highly appreciated.

**\*Indicates required question**

1. i. (i) Name of respondent: \*

\_\_\_\_\_

2. (ii) Age: \*

*Mark only one oval.*

18 years to 27 years

28 years to 37 years

38 years to 47 years

48 years to 57 years

58 years to 67 years

68 years and above

3. (iii) Gender \*

*Mark only one oval.*

Male

Female

4. (iv) Education qualification \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Primary
- Secondary
- Higher Secondary
- College
- University
- Others

5. (v) Employment status? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No

6. (vi) Occupation (if any) \*

---

7. 2. (i) Village/town \*

---

8. (ii) Block \*

---

9. (iii) District \*

---

10. (iv) State \*

\_\_\_\_\_

11. (v) Boundary border with other state and or country? If yes, please mention. \*

\_\_\_\_\_

12. 3 (i) Is there any forest reserve area nearby your village/town? \*

**Mark only one oval.**

Yes

No

13. (ii) Does your village/town falls under any Reserve Forest area?

**Mark only one oval.**

Yes

No

14. (iii) If Yes, is your land a Kash/Forest/Patta land?

**Mark only one oval.**

Kash land

Patta land

Forest land

15. 4. (i) Do all the families belong to Bodo community in your village/town? (Yes/ No) \*

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

16. (ii) If no, then what is the approximate percentage (%) of non-Bodo families? \*

\_\_\_\_\_

17. 5. (i) Is there any primary/ secondary/ high school/ higher secondary/ college/ university in the village/town? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

18. (ii) If yes, how many schools are there and in which medium? \*

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

19. 6. Main Occupation/ source of income of the villagers/town? \*

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

20. 7. What is the source of drinking water? Is there pipeline connectivity? \*

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21. 8. Which are the nearest towns/cities from the village/town? \*

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22. 9. What is the mode of connectivity of the village with the outside world? \*

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23. 10. Is there an electricity connection? \*

**Mark only one oval.**

Yes

No

24. 11. (i) Whether women are part of the decision making body in the village? If yes, what percentage? \*

**Mark only one oval.**

Yes

No

25. (ii) If no, then why? Please specify. \*

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26. 12. (i) Is there any change in land holding and management in the village as per the government acts? \*

**Mark only one oval.**

Yes

No

27. (ii) If yes, then what are the changes? please specify. \*

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28. 13. Which type of social system is there in the village/town especially among the Bodos? \*

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29. 14. In the traditional Bodo social customs was there any differences based on gender in decision making? \*

**Mark only one oval.**

- Yes  
 No  
 Maybe

30. 15. Is there any influence in Bodo customs from different customs belonging to other community? \*

**Mark only one oval.**

- Yes  
 No  
 Maybe

31. 16. (i) Is there any influence of the introduction of Sanskrit and Hindu Law in the tribal life of Bodos since the origin till date? \*

**Mark only one oval.**

- Yes  
 No

32. (ii) If yes, what changes do you see in the customary practices and laws in the community as well as village/town? \*

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33. 17. How important a land is for an individual Bodo? \*

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34. 18. (i) Do the village also have community land system along with personal land? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

35. (ii) Are women allowed to use the land in lease? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

36. 19. What is the traditional land holding system in the community and village/town? \*

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37. 20. (i) Is the present practice of land holding traditional or modified? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

Traditional

Modified

38. (ii) If modified, what are the factors responsible for the changes in the system? Please specify. \*

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39. 21. (i) What is the status of Bodo women in general and in the village/town? \*

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40. (ii) Is there any Self-Help group in your village headed by women?

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41. 22. What do you think about women and their education? \*

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42. 23. Is there any change in the status of women? Please specify. \*

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43. 24. i) In the past, were women given the right to hold land ownership? \*

**Mark only one oval.**

Yes

No

44. If no, then why? Please explain. \*

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45. ii) In the present, do you think women can hold land ownership (buy/given land)? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

46. If yes, can her land be considered and accepted as her identity? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

47. 25. What are the possible problems women faces to have land ownership? \*

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48. 26. What possible consequences you see if women are given permanent land ownership? \*

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49. 27. What are the land ownership criteria for married/widowed women in the Bodo community and in the village/town? Please explain. \*

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50. 28. What assets or property ownership are given to a women as gifts according to the Bodo customs? \*

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51. 29. Do you think changing women-land relations will bring social, economic political changes in the society? Please specify. \*

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52. 30. (i) Have you attended any awareness program and meeting about equal right to land holding, equal economic rights, social justice and human rights? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

53. If no, are you ready to attend one? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

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Google Forms

## Appendix-3

### **List of papers presented in National and International Seminar/Webinar-**

1) Participated in 15 days 'Research Methodology Across Disciplines: Re-Thinking Ethnicity, Gender And History During The Pandemic' conducted by Department of English, Bodoland University. Dated from 16<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> August, 2021. The Paper Entitled As 'GENDER AND SPACE: BALANCING ROLES AND WORKS OF INDIAN WOMEN BEFORE AND DURING COVID-19'

2) Participated and presented in a two day National e-Seminar on Geographies of Sustainable Development' organised by Department of Geography, school of Earth Sciences, Central University of Tamil Nadu, Thiruvavur, in association with The Indian Geographical Society (IGS). Dated on 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> April, 2022. The paper entitled as- 'GENDER DYNAMICS OF INHERITANCE AMONG THE BODO COMMUNITY: QUEST FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT'

3) Presented in a two day International Webinar on ' Interrogating Gender: Challenges and Possibilities of Plural Feminist Standpoints' organised by Centre for Women Studies and Department of English, Bodoland University. On March, 2022. The paper entitled as- "MAADWI" FROM THE KITCHENS TO THE MARKET FRONT: BODO WOMEN PERSPECTIVE'

4) Presented in a two day National Seminar on 'Socio-cultural And Economic Linkages To Sustainable Development In North-east India' conducted by Department of Sociology, Don Bosco College, Arunachal Pradesh. On August, 2019. Paper entitled as- 'A STUDY ON THE SOCIO-POLITICAL SCENARIO AND ITS IMPACT ON THE STATUS OF BODO WOMEN IN ASSAM'

## Appendix-4

### **List of paper publications-**

1) Paper entitled as- A STUDY ON THE SOCIO-POLITICAL SCENARIO AND ITS IMPACT ON THE STATUS OF BODO WOMEN IN ASSAM

Title of the book: Socio-cultural And Economic Linkages To Sustainable Development In North-East India. Edited by: Dr. (Fr.) Jose George, Dr. Tailyang Sirah, Dr. Lalgoin Chongloi. Publisher: Don Bosco College, Jollang, Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh. Year of Publication: September 2020 ISBN: 97893-5636-246-8.

1<sup>st</sup> author- Sumi Narzary and Co-author- Prof. Lanusashi Longkumer.

2) Paper entitled as “MAADWI” FROM THE KITCHENS TO THE MARKET FRONT: BODO WOMEN PERSPECTIVE’

Title of the book: [Un] Making Gender Re-Inventing Selves. Edited by: Zothanchhingi Khiangte, Pratusha Bhowmik, Manab Medhi. Publisher: Authorspress Hauz Khas Enclave, New Delhi-110016. Year of Publication: September 2022 ISBN: 978-93-5529-308-4.

1<sup>st</sup> author- Sumi Narzary and Co-author- Prof. Lanusashi Longkumer.

3) International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR) Paper ID-18179  
Paper Title- Gender And Space: Balancing Roles And Works Of Indian Women Before And During Covid-19 Vol. 6 Issue 2. E-ISSN: 2582-2160. Year of Publication: March, 2024

1<sup>st</sup> author- Sumi Narzary and Co-author- Prof. Lanusashi Longkumer.

4) A research paper got published in International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences (IOSR) Paper ID- K34269 Paper Title- Women And Land Right: From A Bodo Community Perspective Vol. 29, Issue 4, Series 7, e-ISSN: 2279-0837, p-ISSN: 2279-0845, UGC Approved. Year of Publication: April, 2024

1<sup>st</sup> author- Sumi Narzary and Co-author- Prof. Lanusashi Longkumer.

5) A research paper got published in International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences (IOSR) Paper ID- K46027 Paper Title- Employment & Woman Empowerment Provided under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. MGNREGA In Kokrajhar, Assam Vol. 30, Issue 3, Series 5, e-ISSN: 2279-0837, p-ISSN: 2279-0845, UGC Approved. Year of Publication: March, 2025

1<sup>st</sup> author- Sumi Narzary and Co-author- Prof. Lanusashi Longkumer.

6) A research paper got published in International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts (IJCRT) Paper Title- Gender Dynamics of Inheritance Among The Bodo Community: Quest For Sustainable Development Vol. 13, Issue 4, ISSN: 2320-2882, UGC Approved. Year of Publication: April, 2025

1<sup>st</sup> author- Sumi Narzary and Co-author- Prof. Lanusashi Longkumer.