

A Sociological Study on Empowerment of Muslim Women in Darrang District of Assam

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Abstract: *Women Empowerment can be considered a change in the context of a woman's life that enables her increased capacity to lead a fulfilling human life, characterized by external qualities such as health, mobility, education and awareness, status in family, participation in decision making and level of material security, as well as internal qualities such as self-awareness and self confidence. In the era of globalization women empowerment is a vital issue of all over the world. Promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women is one of the fifteenth Millennium Development Goals declared by the UNO. Without empowerment of women in every field like- economic, social, cultural, political etc. no one can think about all round development of the society and the concept of sustainable human development. Women constitute important segment of the society and perform multiple roles such as mother, housewives, wage earners etc. and education is very much essential for performing all these activities more efficiently. Education is one of the most important means of empowering women with knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the developmental process which reduce the gender inequality, discriminations etc.*

GOI has initiated various policies and legislations for women empowerment considering as development of capacities, powers and skills to make a person more confident, more self-reliant and able to take self decisions from the time of independence but unable to reach towards the proper destination mostly the rural area including the entire north-eastern region. Illiteracy, communication gap, male dominant society, less political participation in decision making process, traditional norms, culture, social negligence, unorganized economic participations are some of the problems of women empowerment. But the women participation in the fields of economic, social, political, cultural sector are increasing slowly and steadily day by day in every nook and corner of the country not only from the urban but the rural women becoming more advanced trend. But in Assam the grim picture is that 80% pregnant women suffering from malnutrition, 39% girls children out of reach in school, Gender Equality Index ranked 29th, Gender Development Index rank 26th and the maternal mortality rate is the 2nd in India.

This paper is an attempt to analyze the constraints and prospects of empowerment of Muslim women of Darrang district of Assam.

Keywords: *Education, Empowerment, Sustainable Development, Women.*

I. Introduction:

Women especially from the rural area constitute the largest marginalized section of India and their marginalized should be a matter of deep concern for all. Women particularly upper class and urban areas are more conscious of their rights and duties as well as positions and powers, but the women of the rural areas are a bit different, they are content with the meal of a day and such a mental set up does not make any room in their minds to imagine the life beyond their imagination as well as expectation. The position and the status of women all over the world have risen incredibly in the 20th century though these have been very low in the 18th and the 19th century in India and elsewhere when they treated like objects that can be bought and sold. For a long time in India women remained within four walls of their house.

Empowerment is multi-faceted approach in the topic of sociological research in the context of gender equality and discrimination. Inequality between men and women and discrimination against women has also been age-old issue all over the world. Thus, women's quest for equality with men in matters of education, employment, inheritance, marriage, politics, cultural affairs and self dignity, civil rights and recently in the field of

religion also to serve as cleric is a universal phenomenon. Education is playing vital role in women empowerment. The developed countries of the world are more advanced in empowering women than the rest of the world. Without proper education, guidance, environment no country could be achieved the full potential development of the women society as well as empowerment.

II. Women Empowerment In Islamic (Muslim) Perspective:

Legislators earlier times were harsh towards women. Hindu code of laws says that woman is worse than destiny, storm, death, hell, poisonous snake. The holy Bible says a woman is much bitter than death also mentioned in the Old Testament (chapter of sermon) that anyone wishes to prove himself dear to God, should save him from women. Islam is the only religion and a way of life which presents a very balanced image about women and recognizes the importance of women with a place of respect and reverse to women in human society. It gives sample of consideration to her natural delicateness and has assigned her the duties that are suited to her physical strength. The Islamic ideology- **Sariah** and **Hadith** allow women participating in day to day life activities by declaring the education as the basic fundamental obligation for every woman and man to give essential knowledge, according to the requirement. Prophet Mohammad himself induced women to learn weaving, that shows the women should be trained in handcrafts and home industries, such as tailoring, embroidery, weaving, small industries, business conduct.

Also, Islam has recognized the polygamy, divorce, inheritance, testimony and blood money etc. and explains the sphere of activities of a woman and her participation in various section of social life and thereby basic right in positive trend given to her by Islam.

The Quran states- "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah (the God) has given the one more strength than other and supported them from their means."

According to the French scholar **Dr. Gustawali**- "Islam has brought a comprehensive development in the cultural and social position of women. The Quranic laws of inheritance are more in favor of women compared to the laws of Europe and others."

An eminent Indian author **Milan Ram**- "The people who are followers of the religions should acknowledge the excellence of Islamic **Sariah**. If it so, then the superiority of Islamic ideology will be raised to level which will be beyond imagination. In fact, what Islam presents is the accurate solution of all the problems."

III. Government Initiatives On Empowerment Of Women

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to woman, but also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favor of woman. Every Year the 8th March is observed as International Women's Day when women's problems, policies and programs are only discussed. The Department of Women and Child Development set up in 1985 serves as the nodal agency for women's advancement. The National Commission for Women is a statutory body created in January, 1992 to facilitate redressed grievance and to accelerate the socio-economic development of women, to promote awareness about women's problems and work for the empowerment of women. The Central Social welfare Board promotes welfare activities for all marginalized sections including women to ensure that women receive due benefits in governments, public expenditure, the government has been promoting a 'gender based budgeting' in spite of receiving high attention the implementation of the laws, policies and programs for the benefit of women has plenty of scope for improvement to make them more target oriented and effective. The Government of India passed The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women in the year 2001 emphasized on different goals like creating environment of realize and develop the full potentiality of women, equal access to healthcare, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office etc. It is also emphasized on fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all spheres- political, economic, social, cultural and civil, building strengthen partnerships with civil society, particularly women's

organization, elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and girl child.

IV. A Glance Of Darrang District:

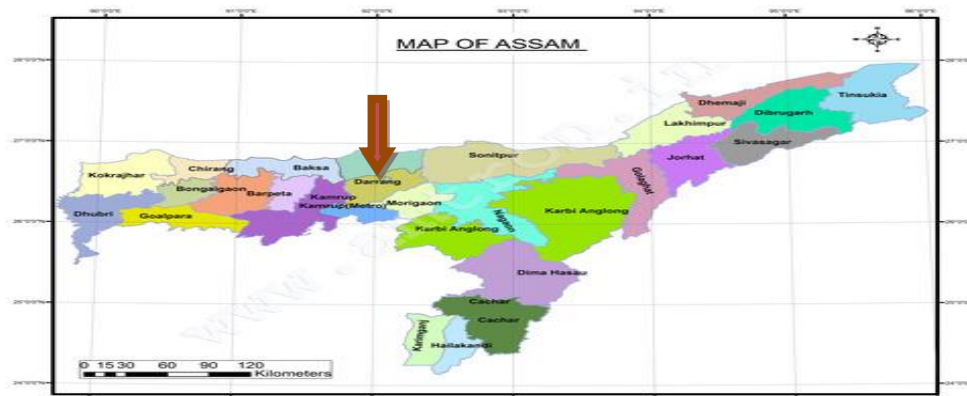


Fig - Map of Assam indicating with Darrang district

Darrang consists of narrow strip of plain is lying between the Himalayas and the Brahmaputra river in the north-west part of Assam. The land which is now known as Darrang district was included in the Hindu Kingdom of **Kamrupa** as mentioned in the **Mahabharata**. The district had been created with effect from July' 1983 converting the erstwhile sub-division of Mangaldai located in 20⁰⁹' N to 26⁰⁹⁵' N and 91⁰⁹' to 92⁰²²' E. The name Darrang was derived from the **Bodo** word '**Dourang**' which means '**Lilabhumi**' (playground of Gods). Some scholars depicted as the word Darrang came from '**Dawrang**' which means 'Gate', as there was direct entry to Bhutan and from there to Nepal, China etc gradually this known as Darrang. The district in general is considered to be plain. On the north there exist the Udalguri district and the mighty river Brahmaputra flows along the southern boundary of the district. The main tributaries of the Brahmaputra in this district are Barnadi, Nowanai, Mangaldoi and Dhanshri. The soil of the district is very fertile for cultivation and the main crops are paddy, oilseeds, sugarcane and jute. The area is also known for its considerable tea products. The main horticultural products are orange, coconut, pineapple, etc. In addition, the district is very rich with sizeable product of vegetables. Total area of district is 1850.58 sq km covering 563 revenue villages, 1 Municipality Board and 2 Town Committees. Total population of the district is 908,090 including 852,692 rural and 55,398 urban populations. Density is 491 per sq km and literacy rate is 64.55% according to the census 2011.

V. Brief Outlook On Muslim Women In Darrang District:

People of different castes, communities and religions scatter in Darrang district of Assam and they are ingredients as well as part and parcel of greater Assamese culture. The Muslim invaded in Assam several times and started settling from the time of the Ahom reign. In Darrang district Muslim citizens are different in origin, mostly Assamese Muslim and Bengali Muslim. The Bengali speaking Muslims are dynastically belong to the East Bengal who migrated from the 17th up to early of the 19th century and also some of them were brought to cultivate the fertile land in the time of British rule. The Assamese origin Muslims are more forward in respect of indigenous culture of Assam, traditions and customs than the Bengali origin Muslims but it on the other hand the rules of **Shariah** is playing a vital role in the practice of religious culture and traditions, customs among the Muslim women.

The Bengali Muslims are thickly populated in the greater Chapori area in the bank of the mighty river Brahmaputra where their livelihood based on agriculture, wage labor, fishing, and unorganized sectors only and the rays of the development is not up to the mark. They are mostly illiterate than others. In the case of women illiteracy is much worse particularly of Muslim not only in Darrang but also in India. The rate of exploitation and violence against the illiterate women particularly in Muslim women are more among the Bengali origin Muslim in Darrang district. Few numbers of Bengali origin Muslim women perceive computer education, automobiles, weaving and tailoring are the most desired trades. Less numbers of Muslim women have access to government and institutional facilities for delivery. They are not conscious for practicing political rights. Self help

groups have been empowering instrument for Muslim women like other parts of Assam. SHGs made women financially self dependent also emerged as an important strategy for alleviating poverty from Muslim areas. Anganbadi Workers, ASHA KARMI and different programs have changed the mindset of the rural women towards the positive trends. There are some hindrances like restrictions on women's mobility, complete child care responsibility, vulnerability to abuse, low access of the rural Muslim women to information and media, low literacy rate, confinement to large manual tasks and poor access to income etc.

VI. Objectives Of The Study:

- 6.1 To observe and identify the problems of empowerment of Muslim women.
- 6.2 To find out the prospects of women empowerment.

VII. Research Methodology:

- 7.1 **Research Design:** The study has been carried out by the observation method and especially descriptive in nature.
- 7.2 **Population:** The entire Muslim Women of Darrang District of Assam constituted as population of the present study.
- 7.3 **Data Collection Method:** Data has been collected by applying both secondary and primary method of data collection. Secondary data has been utilized to find out the theoretical information and consists of books, journals etc.

VIII. Findings Of The Study:

- 8.1 Muslim women are mostly illiterate. In this area the parents are not so conscious about the women education. Lack of Institution one of the major factors of women empowerment. Adult Education, Total Literacy and other programs are not actively activated and functioning among the Muslim women.
- 8.2 In the poor section of the society the "Traditional Sex Role" of the mother, grandmother, aunts, sisters of the girl child makes her to go school and other participation as it becomes secondary.
- 8.3 Women in this area remain marginalized due to discrimination, deprivation, exploitation, sexual and other harassments and atrocities and poor implementations of government measuring including laws. They are subject to most domestic violence.
- 8.4 This society is mostly male dominant; women are found to be equal partners in progress, yet they remain subjected to marginalization and exploitation.
- 8.5 Muslim women in the study areas are the poorest, backward and economically vulnerable mostly unorganized labor etc. their work opportunities are only related to agro based activities. The engagement in secondary and tertiary sectors is very low. In present time they are migrating towards the other urban regions of India searching their unorganized labor work opportunity.
- 8.6 Lack of proper religious knowledge and misinterpretation of the Islamic law of *Sariah* and *Hadith* are playing a vital hindrance in empowering women. The Islamic clerics are away from the proper interpretation of rule of *Sariah* as well as some of them (clerics) divide the society sectional division results social chaos.
- 8.7 Social evils like early child marriage hinders to the empowerment of women. There is a social mandate existing mostly in the Chapori areas that, boys maximum 15-16 years age and girls 12 to 14 years age have to go under marry.
- 8.8 Excessive birth is one of the major problems for the maintaining good health among the Muslim women and most vulnerable among the Bengali origin Muslim.
- 8.9 Maintenance of health status is very poor among the Muslim women. Communication and transport problem, lack of sufficient staff, dearth of sufficient health centre, and lack of primary health training, malnutrition are the causes of not accessing the maternal and other health facilities of women in Muslim dominant rural areas of Darrang.
- 8.10 The low participation in politics, public policy and decision making process have led to the marginalization of the women. They cast their votes only but not aware of the philosophy and ideology of the political parties. In India 33 percent seats are reserved for women in local self government according to the 73rd and 74th amendment of our constitution but the elected women representatives are not free from the domination of their male counterpart also they have to work under male dominant circumstance.
- 8.11 Gender inequality and discriminations are highly existing factors among the women mostly in rural areas. There is no congenial environment exists among the Muslim society in empowering women.

- 8.12 The access of financial assistance from banks and other government institutions are very low among the Muslim women in the Chapori areas. There is a psycho-sociological impact existing among the working persons in financial institutions that they are unwilling to go the remote sections of the society.
- 8.13 The existing traditional cultural affairs and psychological mind set up among the Muslims are the barricades of empowerment of women.
- 8.14 The access of the ICT facilities among the Muslim women mostly Bengali origin are very poor.

IX. Suggestions:

The following suggestions are made to empower the women in different dimensions of the society and sustainable human development.

9.1 Economic Dimension:

- 9.1.1 Different skill development programs for the women can make empower in economic sectors.
- 9.1.1 Ensure parallel participation of every woman with her male counterpart and financial autonomy.
- 9.1.2 Provide loan or other facilities for women entrepreneurs.
- 9.1.3 Micro- economic development projects help in empowering women.
- 9.1.4 More reservation facilities for women in government services.

9.2 Political Dimension:

- 9.2.1 Women should allow to practice their democratic privileges without interfere from their family or other.
- 9.2.2 Women's right based agendas have to be incorporated in the political process.
- 9.2.3 Information dissemination on legal safeguards, rights, support services, health accommodation etc.
- 9.2.4 Facilities for 50 percent reservation in the Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, PRI etc.
- 9.2.5 Free and fair participation in decision –making process.
- 9.2.6 Government should take appropriate measures to reduce difficulties in the process of implementation of various schemes related to women empowerment.

9.3 Social Dimension:

- 9.3.1 Need to reduce the violence against the women.
- 9.3.2 There must be few NGOs and other organizations for work on women empowerment need to create awareness against the social epidemics- gender discrimination, gender inequality etc.
- 9.3.3 Equal importance to the girl child with boy and create the awareness of 1:1 sex ratio.
- 9.3.4 Safe and secure Environment for developing the Potentialities of women.
- 9.3.5 Adopt the concept of sustainable human development.
- 9.3.6 Make the slogan 'Beti Bacaho Beti Padao' a social tradition.
- 9.3.7 Allow to practice all democratic and human rights and duties as well.
- 9.3.8 Need to remove and reduce superstitious belief, religious suppression from the society.

9.4 Educational Dimension:

- 9.4.1 Head of the families should not discourage their daughter for education.
- 9.4.2 Government should ensure free and compulsory girl's education up to graduation level.
- 9.4.3 Government should give importance to universal education for all girls'.
- 9.4.4 Reservation facilities in higher education for backward rural girls.
- 9.4.5 Establishment of more and more educational institutions in remote backward areas for women.
- 9.4.6 Gear up the Women Adult Education program among the rural women.

9.5 Cultural Dimension:

- 9.5.1 Every woman should be allowed to practice their different aspects of culture according to choose.
- 9.5.2 No excessive religious burden should be imposed towards the practice of cultural aspects of women.

9.6 Health Status:

- 9.6.1 Ensure proper nutrition for women.
- 9.6.2 Proper execution of government health policy for women.

- 9.6.3 Ensure proper hospitality to the every mother and new born child.
- 9.6.4 Control of unprecedented birth.

X. Conclusion:

For Empowerment of Women in every society must change their attitude, behavior in positive trend and essential to create congenial environment towards the women and to recognize their rightful place in the decision-making process. Women should have greater autonomy in decision-making, greater ability to plan their lives and free them from shackles imposed by prevailing customs, beliefs and practices. They should become active members in development process rather than mere beneficiaries of programs and services. Women must be provided opportunities to have control over production resources that would lead to better life for their families and their children. Women mostly working in groups there are need to organize women's societies for various activities involving group engagement a strong and effective women cooperative movement is desirable to boost economic development process of rural women and families. Women should not only be financial supporter but should also play the role of decision making process of the family. To solve the problems of women empowerment the attitude of the male dominant society should be changed. Both the State and Central Government have to play a vital role in the process of policy frame and execution.

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