



## Political Participation and Empowerment of Muslim women in Char Areas: A study of Morigaon district of Assam.

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**Abstract:** *This is a future research conceptual article, Though the latest programme in rural development is logically an improvement over the earlier programmes on several grounds, yet its potentiality to transform rural India remains inconclusive. Several studies carried out by various researchers found that even with better provisions that have been brought into the programme to ensure people's participation, accountability and transparency in relation to the earlier programmes, there is a doubt whether the programme has delivered in accordance with its objectives in the process of its implementation.*

*Political participation is a term that is applied to the activities of people from all level of a political system. Sometimes the term is applied more to political orientation than activities. It refers to those voluntary activities by which members of the society have a share in the selection of rulers and directly or indirectly have a role in the formation of public policy. These activities include voting, seeking information, discussing, attending public meetings, contributing financially and communicating with representatives.*

*Political empowerment involves increasing women's participation in political processes and decision-making. In the Char area, women often have limited representation in local governance structures, such as village councils and panchayats. Empowerment is considered as the expansion of assets and capabilities of the poor people to participate in, negotiate with, control and hold accountable the institution that affect their lives. With the objective of achieving empowerment of rural people in terms of improving their political and socio-economic condition, the present study aims to investigate the empowerment of the Muslim people in char (river island) areas of Morigaon district in Assam. Morigaon district of Assam happens to be the most backward district in terms of the level of employment, level of literacy, level of poverty and many other economic parameters. Morigaon district is situated in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam. With a total area of 1551 sq. km, it is the home of 957,423 persons as per the 2011 Census. Muslims constitutes 52.56% of Morigaon population with 246,171 muslim females. The total literacy rate of Morigaon district is 68.03%. The male literacy rate is 59.53% and the female literacy rate is 53.15% in Morigaon district. MGNREGA is a rural development programme which has emphasized on peoples participation at the grass root level in all matters relating to their benefits of empowerment. Qualitative as well as quantitative method has been used to carry out this research. This study analyze the Level of Empowerment of the Participants in MGNREGA with Special Emphasis on muslim Women Participants attempts to examine the level of empowerment of both the participants as well as of the non-participants of MGNREGA on the social, economical & political ground. The findings of this study with regard to empowerment of the participants of MGNREGA reveal that the participants are economically empowered after joining the programme, as they can earn some extra income especially during the slack season of agriculture.*

**Key Words:** *Morigaon district, Assam, MGNREGA, muslim women, empowerment, char areas.*



## 1. INTRODUCTION:

The concept of empowerment flows from power. It is vesting where it does not exist or exist inadequately. Julian Rappaport, an American psychologist introduced the concept of empowerment into social work and social psychiatry. Rappaport viewed empowerment as a process- the mechanism by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their lives (Rappaport, 1981). For Robert Adams empowerment is the capacity of individuals, groups or communities to take control of their circumstances, exercise power and achieve their own goals, and the process by which, individually and collectively, they are able to help themselves and others to maximize the quality of their lives (Adams, 2008).

The word empowerment has also been used to refer a process. As a process it implies obtaining basic opportunities for marginalized people, either directly by non-marginalized others who share their own resources and experiences with the marginalized people. It also includes encouraging and developing the skills of the marginalized people for self-sufficiency. Thus, empowerment means the expansion of assets and capabilities of the poor people to participate in, negotiate with, control and hold accountable the institution that affect their lives. It particularly includes control over resources and ideology.

Women's empowerment is being defined in numerous ways. Basically it means accommodating women's perspectives in different issues relating to life and raising the status of women through education, awareness, literacy, and training (Kabeer, 2005)) Women's empowerment equips and allows women to make life-determining decisions. Thus they may have the opportunity to re-define gender roles or other such roles, which allow them more freedom to pursue desired goals. Women empowerment has been understood as the process by which the powerless women gain greater control over the circumstances of their lives. So far as women empowerment is concerned, it has different dimensions - economic, social, political, and psychological. Economic empowerment involves increasing the economic independence of women and their ability to make decisions about their financial resources. Social empowerment involves improving the status of women in society and addressing gender-based discrimination. Political empowerment involves increasing women's participation in political processes and decision-making. Psychological empowerment involves increasing women's self-confidence, self-esteem etc. Empowerment of women would mean equipping women to be economically independent, self-reliant, have positive esteem to enable them to face any difficult situation and they should be able to participate in development activities. The empowered women should be able to participate in the process of decision making.

The mighty Brahmaputra River in its journey through the middle of Assam has led to formation of large number of wastelands. In Assamese language these wastelands are called char/chaporis. Chars are formed during floods with deposits of silts from year to year (Barua, 2015). Government of Assam defines the char areas as sandy land areas extended from Sadiya to Dhubri within the river Brahmaputra or surrounded by water of river Brahmaputra where people can live and cultivate. It also includes areas on either side of the river Brahmaputra extended up to embankment which are recurrently affected by floods and where people live and cultivate the land (Chakrabarty, 2009).

## 2. Statement of the Problem:

The geographical spread of Char is all over 14 districts of Assam en route the journey of the river Brahmaputra. As per the Socio-economic survey report of 1992-93, there were altogether 2089 Chars with Barpeta district having the highest number of Chars (351). According to this report Morigaon district had 40 numbers of Chars- which constitute 2% of Char areas of Assam. However, as per the report prepared in 2003-04, by the Directorate of Char Areas Development, there were altogether 2251 char villages in all these 14 districts with a total population of 24,90,097. Dhubri district has the highest number of Chars as per the 2003-04 survey. It shows the geographical instability of Char areas. However, according to 2003-04 report, Morigaon district had 40 numbers of Chars and constantly had 2% of total Char areas of Assam.

The Char areas of Assam has been far backward than the mainland Assam in key different sectors.

- Literacy rate of Assam in 1991 was 52.89% and in 2001 it was 63.30% while in char areas it was just 15.45% and 19.31% respectively. In this decade literacy rate of Assam increased by nearly 10 percentage points, while in char areas it increased less than 4 percentage points.



- Between the 1992-93 and 2002-03 survey, the area of the char land increased marginally by 1.37% - whereas population increased by 56%. During this period decadal growth rate of population of Assam was only 18.85%. It means growth rate of population is 37% more in Char areas.
- In char areas total number of LP Schools in 2002-03 was only 1852 and in terms of percapita availability of LP schools, this figure comes to only 0.07%. (Nayak & Panda)
- The density of population in char areas was more than double of the state as a whole. In Char areas, the density of population in 2002-03 was 690 per sq.km. while only 340 per sq.km for the state as a whole.
- The char areas inhabit 9.37% of total population of the state while they possess only 4% of Assam's agricultural land (Chakrabarty, 2009).

Thus, the above discussion reveals that Char areas are ridden with problems like illiteracy, poverty and population explosion. In the midst of geographical instability, the Char chapori dwellers are in the midst of vicious cycle of poverty and population explosion. In the Char area, women are often engaged in agricultural activities, such as paddy cultivation, fishing, and livestock rearing. However, they face challenges such as lack of access to credit, market information, and technical know-how. To address these challenges, there is a need to provide women with training and education on financial literacy, business management, and entrepreneurship. This can be done through the establishment of self-help groups, microfinance institutions, and other forms of support.

In the Char area, women often face restrictions on their mobility, access to education, and participation in decision-making processes. To address these issues, there is a need to promote gender equality through awareness-raising campaigns, education, and advocacy. This can be done through partnerships with civil society organizations, community-based organizations, and religious leaders.

### **3. Objectives of the Study:**

The followings are the objectives of the study:

- To understand the socio-economic status of Muslim women in char areas.
- To know about political awareness of the Muslim women in char areas.
- To find out the hindrances they face in their all-round development.

### **4. Scope of the Study:**

The study will cover the char areas of the Morigaon district of Assam. Presently, there are 40 numbers of Char in the district. This scope of the study will encompass the socio-political and economic aspects of life of women in char areas to understand their level of empowerment. This study will also search the factors responsible for backwardness of the char areas.

### **5. Literature review:**

- The Assam movement class, ideology and identity” by Monirul Hussain (1995) has been an important publication that depicts life of Muslim community in Assam.
- Narayan Konwar's “Society and Politics in Assam” (2006) has been an another important work which discusses life of people in char areas.
- Dr. Monoj Kumar Nath's “The Muslim Question in Assam and Northeast India” (2021) has been a recent publication that discusses different issues relating to Muslims in Assam including the role of leadership and voting behaviour of minority Muslim population of Assam.



## 6. Proposed Methodology:

Empirical, descriptive and analytical methods will be used for the study.

Both primary and secondary data will be used for the study. Primary data will be collected from the local residents-particularly women of different chars of the Morigaon district. Primary data will be collected through structured questionnaire and interview schedule. The prominent members of the area will be interviewed. The secondary data will be collected from various books, journals, newspaper etc. Internet service will be used to get various online data.

## 7. Conclusion :

In conclusion, the empowerment of Muslim women in the Char area of Morigaon district of Assam requires a comprehensive and integrated approach that addresses the multiple dimensions of empowerment. This approach should involve partnerships between government agencies, civil society organizations, community-based organizations, and religious leaders. By empowering women, we can create a more inclusive and equitable society that benefits all members of the community.

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