

Socio-Economic Condition of Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe Women Workers of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) (A Case Study of Madugula Mandal in Visakhapatnam District)

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Abstract

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) is a major step forward, which not only provides guaranteed employment, but also empowers rural communities to demand work as part of their basic entitlements that are essential for participating in the larger process of development in the country. Empowerment brings betterment, improvement or tremendous changes in the present position compared to previous position. Earlier women, especially the rural poor women second consideration behind women. With the passage of time the position and condition of women changed. Literacy programmes, awareness programmes and different kinds of employment generating programme the condition of women has improved a lot. The MGNREGS is attractive and prestigious programme especially for women because it stipulates that one third of the total workers should be women. The main focus of the paper is on the impact of MGNREGS on Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe beneficiaries of women workers in Visakhapatnam district. The study covered 200 women sample beneficiaries, 100 from Schedule Caste and 100 from Schedule Tribe categories.

Keywords — MGNREGS, Rural women Employment, Empowerment and Economic Security.

I. INTRODUCTION

India has been mainly a rural economy. About 80% of its population lives in villages. Near about 30% of the rural people are living below the poverty line even today. Rural development is a matter of global concern today because it has the largest reservoir of the human resources. At present abundant human resources are available in most of the developing countries. But the important aspect of human resources of rural development has not been

given its due recognition in these countries (K.S. Gopal, 2009).

In developing countries like India most of the population is getting absorbed into agricultural sector and its allied activities (Mihar Shah and P. Ambasta, 2008). But still the people, who are engaged in agricultural, are lagging behind in socio-economic and cultural development. The development of rural areas is vital for the survival of the third world countries, as majority of the rural people are victims of the vicious circle of poverty.

In India, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) provides social and economic security for the rural poor. The MGNREG Act is the first tangible commitment by which the poor can expect to earn a living wage, without loss of dignity and demand this as a right (Santosh Mehrotra, 2008).

MGNREG Act has placed a judicially enforceable obligation on the state governments. Under the provision of the Act, the state Governments are to provide work within 15 days of a person making an application within a radius of 15 kms from the applicant's residence. Failing this, the state government is to provide an unemployment allowance. Workers are entitled to a statutory minimum wage for their labour, to be paid within seven days after the work is done. Men and Women are to be paid equal wages. This Act is based on the principle of self-selection by focusing on unskilled, manual work.

MGNREGA is a highly gender sensitive scheme. It is mandatory that at least one third of the workers should be women. The share of women at the national level is 40 Per cent. The share of person-days worked by the women in Andhra Pradesh is 49 per cent which is a little more than their share in the population. It is again necessary to provide various facilities at the worksite like drinking water and baby

shelters. The provision of baby sitters will free the women of all the worries of taking care of their little kids. This provision is women friendly in another way that this will spare the elder siblings from rearing the younger ones. Thus the scheme promotes the education of girl child also. Women are more attracted towards the scheme because the wage level for women labourers are less than that of the male counterparts in the market.

II. LITERATURE OF REVIEW

Indian economy has been perennially afflicted with the problem of unemployment, especially in the rural areas. The Rural employment growth trends reflect increased incidence of unemployment. Even the underemployment, especially amongst the rural women, has increased in recent times. The Act Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme provided for the enhancement of livelihood security of the Indian rural households by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in every financial year to every household. The programme intends to eliminate the gender wage differentials in the rural labour markets as it ensures equal wages for the male and female workers. In India majority of rural women live in virtual isolation, have little access to even the most basic services. MGNREGS is one of the success missions in the country in implementing the project especially empowering women.

Moghadam, V. M. and Lucie Senftova (2005) study found that there have been many attempts to measure women's empowerment in the development field, but these have had various shortcomings. They are used to assess women's participation (referring to an active social condition), rights (referring to a formal, legal condition) and capabilities (preconditions for the enjoyment of rights and enhancement of participation). The domains are: socio-demographic indicators, bodily integrity and health, literacy and educational attainment, economic participation and rights, political participation and rights, cultural participation and rights. Indicators include: life expectancy at birth, sexual and physical abuse against women, literacy rates, amount of maternity leave, and number of feminist resources in the print and electronic media.

Kabeer, N. (2005) revealed that the third Millennium Development Goal (MDG) on gender equality and women's empowerment and highlights ways in which the indicators associated with this goal-women's access to education, share of non-agricultural wage employment, and political participation-can contribute to women's empowerment. Each of these indicators has the potential to bring about immediate changes in women's lives, along with long-term transformations in patriarchal power structures. But unless provision is

made to ensure that policy changes are implemented in ways that allow women themselves to participate, monitor, and hold policy makers and corporations accountable for their actions, the potential for women's empowerment will be limited.

Lalit Mathur (2007) has clearly explained that the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) is the first tangible commitment to the poor that they can expect to earn a living wage, without loss of dignity, and demand this as a right. The NREGA was extended to the entire country since 2008-09. The Act itself was enacted after considerable opposition from within the government itself.

Richard Mahapatra (2010) has concluded from his study that as more women than men working under the National programme that guarantees employment to rural people. Women availed of more than 50% of employment created under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. Their participation has been growing since the inception of the act in 2006. This is remarkable given that only 28.7 percent women form a part of the country work force.

Nidhi Vij (2013) analysed the impact of social protection program like MGNREGA on poor people of schedule caste, schedule tribe and backward caste. Social protection programs have been an important part of development process and planning in India. Despite a plethora of social protection programs, vulnerable groups among the poor have not been well targeted. However, the recent paradigm shift towards rights-based legislations may have hit the right chord with its self-targeting mechanism.

Poor and certain vulnerable sections within the poor such as women, elderly, and children disabled, and socially-excluded groups are marginalized and discriminated against overtly and in more subtle ways on basis of gender, caste, religion or region. Gender inequalities and discrimination are still pervasive in rural workforce, with rural women occupying lower positions compared to their counterparts. Rural women, particularly belonging to lower caste groups, were at a greater disadvantage due to limited access to assets, lower levels of education and skill. On basis of religion, Muslim women had the lowest employment rate in rural India. Women in general marginalized from participation and excluded from social protection programs. The traditional caste system, denying and differentiating lower castes and classes form all forms of social life.

Participation of women and socially backward groups has been exceptionally high. This paper analyses the policy provisions, implementation and monitoring mechanism of MGNREGA to argue that policy designs with legal enforceable mechanisms and

collaborative governance systems can lead to empowerment of the marginalized.

The foregoing literature clearly deliberating about rural women empowerment towards the MGNREGS, implementation of programme, women participation in MGNREGS, Poverty alleviation and social auditing of the scheme, especially rural women employment programmes, hence Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme will help to improve the women empowerment and increase the employment to women in Rural Areas.

Since independence, many schemes for the welfare of the weaker sections of the society have been started in India. So, India has a long history and experience in implementing wage employment programmes such as community development programme, small farmers, development agency, drought prone area programme, minimum needs programmes, twenty point economic programme, desert development programme, training of rural growth for self-employment, rural landless employment guarantee programme, rural landless employment guarantee programme, integrated rural development programme, Antodya Yojana, Jawajar Rojagar Yojana, Employment Insurance Scheme, Swarnajayanti Grama Swaroagar Yojana, Jawahar Grama Smridhi Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Gramalayajoyana etc. implementation by state governments with central assistance. These programmes are self-targeting and the objective is to provide enhanced livelihood security, especially to those dependent on casual manual labour. Beginning with community development programme in 1952, the outreach of these programmes increased significantly, culminating in national rural employment guarantee scheme which was implemented by the enactments of the national rural employment guarantee Act (NREGA) 2005.

More women than men work under the National programme that guarantees employment to rural people. Now, women availed of more than 50% of employment created under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. Their participation has been growing since the inception of the act in 2006. This is remarkable given that only 28.7 percent women form a part of the countries work force.

MGNREGA is one of the largest single rights-based social protection initiatives in the world. MGNREGA is the first ever low internationally, that guarantee wage employment at an unprecedented scale. The potential of MGNREGA spans a range of possibilities. The primary objective of the Act is augmenting wage employment. The choice of works suggested in the Act addresses wise of chronic poverty like drought, deforestation and soil erosion, so that the process of employment generation is maintained on a sustainable basis.

The MGNREGS is possibly the most ambitious income security programme for India's rural poor in past independence era. Around 30% of Indians live in absolute poverty. Most of the vulnerable are from the SC, ST and the other backward classes. The rural poor principally comprise of landless laborers, who are not even assured of finding work on a daily basis. The purpose of the scheme is to employ labour to create rural assets.

MGNREGS is a ray of hope for the rural poor and unskilled laborers who are in the clutches of poverty deprivation and discrimination, particularly on economic and social fronts. The MGNREGA works are intended to create permanent assets in the rural areas for future needs. These include water conservation and water harvesting, drought proofing (including forestation and tree plantation), irrigation canals including micro and minor irrigation works, provision of irrigation facility, horticulture plantation and land development facilities on land owned by households belonging to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes or to below poverty line families or to beneficiaries under the Indira Awas Yojana of the government, renovation of traditional water bodies including desalting of tanks, land development, flood control and protection works including drainage in water logged areas, rural connectivity to provide all-weather access and any other work which may be notified by the central government in consultation with the state governments. During the financial year (2015-16) the following activities have been undertaken under MGNREGA so far.

Under the employment guarantee scheme, it is required to identify various jobs in the identified districts of the state. The employment opportunities are created in the works like water conservation, water harvesting, drought proofing, and flood control, renovation of traditional water bodies, land development and rural connectivity. The jobs are mainly by the major social groups including Scheduled Castes and Tribes, landless labourers and other Backward Classes. The present study shows the Socio-economic conditions of MGNREGA women workers of SC and ST Community in Madugula mandal in Visakhapatnam district.

III.OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study are:

- i. To analyse the socio-economic characteristics of SC and ST women beneficiaries in Visakhapatnam district.
- ii. To suggest policy recommendation for improving the livelihoods of SC and ST women.

IV.METHODOLOGY

The study was selected Madugula mandal in Visakhapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh State. The study is mainly based on primary data. For the purpose of

the study 100 women respondents from SC women and the age group of 26-40 years in the both 100 women respondents from ST categories on the basis of simple random sampling method. Thus, altogether 200 women beneficiaries of MGNREGS were selected and interviewed with the help of well-structured Schedule. Their reference period was 2015-16.

TABLE I

SOCIO-ECONOMIC FEATURES OF SAMPLE BENEFICIARIES

S. No		SC		ST	
		No	%	No	%
1	Age group				
	Below 25	4	4	11	11
	26 - 40	60	60	80	80
	41- 60 years	36	36	9	9
	Total	100	100	100	100
2	Education Status				
	Illiterates	84	84	94	94
	Primary	8	8	6	6
	Upper	8	8	Nil	Nil
	Total	100	100	100	100
3	Type of Family				
	Nuclear	96	96	91	91
	Joint	4	4	9	9
	Total	100	100	100	100
4	Type of the house				
	Kutchha	44	44	91	91
	Semi-pucca	8	8	Nil	Nil
	Pucca	48	48	9	9
	Total	100	100	100	100
5	Main Occupation				
	Agricultural	20	20	43	43
	Daily wage	40	40	23	23
	Small	28	28	6	6
	MGNREGS	12	12	28	28
	Total	100	100	100	100
6	Average monthly income				
	Before	4908.		5506.	
	After	5200.		5926.	
	Percentage	5.96		7.62	

One of the important factors that influence the economic development is the age structure in any economy. The data reveals that the age group of the Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe women workers of MGNREGS respondents in the Madugula mandal, the high percentages are noticed in the age group of 26-40 years which are 60 and 80 percent respectively.

From this it is concluded that as high as 70 percent of the respondents in the study area belonging

Education plays a vital role as an ambassador any society for bringing changes in the social status. The facilitates of education gives better knowledge and makes life easier to interact in the various important fields like political, economic, social and others. If one is educated then one will be able to play a successful role in the family and as well as in society.

The percentage of illiterate respondents of MGNREGS women workers is 84 percent in SC community, while it is 94.00 percent in ST community. In SC community 8 percent of the respondents have primary education, while it is 6 percent in ST community. In SC community 8 percent of the respondents have upper primary education and no upper primary respondents in ST community. It may be observed that more than 80 percent of respondents of MGNREGS are illiterates in both communities.

It is concluded that though the MGNREGS schemes are helping both literate and illiterate workers the percentage of illiterate beneficiaries are more in both the communities.

In any society the nuclear family consists of a married couple and their off- spring while the joint families are much larger and consist of members beyond the nuclear families. The family was the most universal and permanent institution of mankind. But today, radical changes are found in the spheres of political, economic, social and cultural life. The changes in socio-economic condition of the people are also reflected in the institution of the family. Now it is of interest to analyse to what extent the family structures are undergoing changes in the study area.

It is noticed that in SC community 96 percent of the families are nuclear families and the remaining 4 percent are joint families. In ST community 91 percent of the families are nuclear and the remaining 9 percent of the families are joint families. Altogether 93.50 percent of the respondents are nuclear family and the remaining 6.50 percent are joint families.

Hence, it may be concluded that nuclear families are predominant in the both communities. From this it may be inferred that the joint family type is fading out giving way for nuclear family type.

Respondents of both communities, 48 percent of SC respondents are living in pucca houses but 91 percent of ST respondents are living in kutchha houses.

Hence, it may be concluded that the housing conditions of beneficiaries belonging to SC respondents are more comfort than ST's in study area. However, high percent of the respondents are living in

kutchha houses so they need to improve their living conditions.

One of the important indicators of the socio-economic profile is occupation of the respondents. The main occupation of the respondents is agricultural labour and daily wage labour but 17 percent of the respondents are cultivating their own lands and 20 percent respondents are depending upon MGNREGS works only.

Conclusively, more ST respondents are working as MGNREGS labour then SC respondents. ST respondents are giving more priority to agricultural labour whereas SC respondents are giving priority to daily wage labour.

The data deliberates regarding average income of the respondents that the average income of the SC, ST respondents is less before joining in the MGNREGS but after joining in the rural employment guarantee scheme 5.96 percent of SC and 7.54 percent of ST women worker's average income is improved.

Respondents of ST community are participating in the MGNREGS more than SCs. It influences their average incomes such that the average income of the ST respondents is little more than SC respondents. It inferences, the MGNREG scheme is well penetrating into both SC and ST communities in the study area.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The women workers currently engaged in MGNREGA are mainly in the age group 26-40 years and mostly illiterate though the MGNREGS schemes are helping both literate and illiterate workers the percentage of illiterate beneficiaries are more in both the communities. The changes in socio-economic condition of the people are also reflected in the institution of the family that nuclear families are predominant in the both communities so that it may be inferred that the joint family type is fading out giving way for nuclear family type. The housing conditions of beneficiaries belonging to SC respondents are more comfort than ST's in study area. However, high percent of the respondents are living in kutchha houses so they need to improve their living conditions. As per as occupation most of the ST respondents are giving priority to work as agricultural labour whereas SC respondents are giving priority to daily wage labour. Respondents of ST community are participating in the MGNREGS more than SCs. It influences their average incomes such that the average income of the ST respondents is little more than SC respondents.

At present the development economists have been arguing that the development process should be job-oriented. In the light of this argument it may be concluded that the MGNREG schemes provide social and economic security for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The MGNREG scheme is tangible commitment on the part of the government to protect the poor, to earn a minimum wage without loss of dignity.

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