

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT THROUGH MGNREGA: A CASE STUDY OF JAGARDEVPUR VILLAGE

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Abstract: Empowerment of women is pre-condition for sustainable and inclusive growth for any society. Empowerment aims at building capacities and creating suitable conditions to enable women to register overall development. Seen from this perspective, this paper analyzes efforts of women's empowerment efforts and debates associated with it. The paper discusses different dimensions of empowerment like political, economic, educational etc. The policy makers and Government of India have implemented various programmes and schemes for empowerment of women. One such scheme is MGNREGA i.e. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005. This paper analyzes the role of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee in bringing about change in the lives of women and thereby contributing to their empowerment in these three dimensions.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act & Women Empowerment

Introduction: Empowerment is a process aimed at changing the nature and direction of systematic forces for marginalized women and other disadvantaged sections of the society. Empowerment of women is a long and difficult process which is to be promoted with full public support. It can be successful only when women suppressed by male dominated society and living at the lower strata can rise up to claim their rightful place in their own society (Kar, 2013) [1]. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issues in determining the status of women (MRDE, 2008) [2]. In 1971, following a resolution of the ministry of education and social welfare, the committee was constituted at the U.N general assembly on the status of women in India (CSWI). The CSWI celebrated the year 1975 as international women's year in order to bring out equality. In 1976 national plan of action for women was formulated by department of social welfare government of India. In 1978 as presented the report on employment for women as well as development of working rural women [2]. Indian womanhood still suffers deprivation and discriminatory attitudes. In spite of the drawbacks in the implementation of the legislation and overarching infrastructure and social set up, significant benefits have already started accruing to women through better access to local employment at minimum wages, with relatively decent safe work condition [1].

1. Gender and MGNREGA:

1.1 Gender and Empowerment through Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act:

[1] Stated that Gender is the inevitable push factor for growth and development of nation like India. In India, women constitute a major share of chronically constitute a major share of chronically poor population. (Gayatri, 2008) "See women's

empowerment in terms of removal of gender discrimination. She argues that the empowerment "entails the transformation of the structure or institution that reinforces and perpetuates gender discrimination." In the context of India, Sundstrom, (2008) notes that women are in much worse position than men not only in term of sex ratio, literacy rate, work force participation, life expectancy but also in terms of their access to power structure. According to [1] Indian womanhood still suffers deprivation and discriminatory attitudes. It is very necessary to strengthen the women power if we want our country to progress in all spheres of development. Hust, (2004) notes that a majority of the women lag behind men, they are less educated, less exposed, more dependent as well as command lesser capabilities than the men. Hence, the theoretical response to the problems regarding women empowerment is quite scary (as discussed in Sundstrom 2008). "The government has formed different programme / schemes for development and to uplift the women such as Mahatma Gandhi National rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), which was enacted in 2005" [1]. "The MGNREGA, 'with its guarantee of 100 days of unskilled work for every household, has been envisaged as gender sensitive scheme', the main way in which a scheme for social protection can to be made gender sensitive is to suggest that a certain percentage of beneficiaries must be women, which have been provided for in the Act: "While providing employment, priority shall be given to women in such a way that at least one third of the beneficiaries shall be women how have registered and requested for work under the scheme" (MGNREGA, schedule II, section 6:19). "MGNREGA has provided a unique opportunity to people from rural India to earn their own income without any discrimination of caste and gender. Most remarkable feature of MGNREGA is that it pays the same wages to men and women" [1]. The scheme has

already completed 7 years and now it is good time to review the scheme whether it is providing participation of men and women in employment from rural India or not.

The major question arises that, whether in reality MGNREGA scheme is providing employment for women and supporting the gender empowerment or not. One of the justifications provided by the schemes is that their main focus is on ‘women’ and so far as the employment guarantee policy is seen as a tool that can promote job creation and bring about women empowerment, it will be relevant to examine the scheme from that angle whether it is really providing employment to the women and thus empowering them. A number of studies, till date, have been conducted regarding Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee impact on the empowerment of women in rural areas, for instance (Kar 2013, Pankaj. A, Tanka. R, 2010).

So far, the studies have provided positive correlation between Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee and women’s empowerment.

2. Methods and Technique of Data Collection:

This is a primary data based research study comprising of both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Some portions of study have employed secondary data also to substantiate findings of the case study.

2.1: Method of Data Collection:

The study makes use of open ended questionnaire, Case Study technique and also consists of focused group discussion to get perspective of women’s enrolled in Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee at community/village level. An effort has been made to directly experience the

real life situation of the respondents through interactions with them during interviews.

2.2: Sampling Structure:

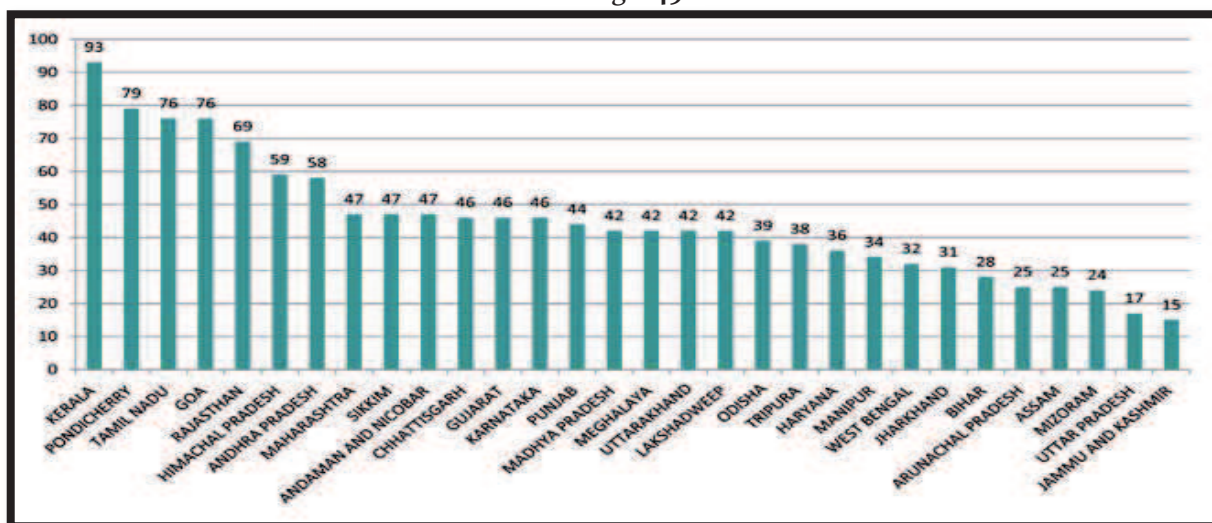
In Uttar Pradesh, Varanasi (excluding Varanasi city) district has been selected and subsequently one block (Arajilina) in the district where one village (Jagardevpur) from selected Block has been selected. In village, 50 beneficiaries have been selected on the basis of the list of existing job-card holders and those who are completed their 3-5 years in MGNREGA. Thus, the approximate total targeted sample number is 50 from village. The selection of the district is on the basis of women’s participation in MGNREGA in the villages. The study follows multi stage stratified random sampling

3. Justification of Area Selection:

3.1 Selection of the state:

The selection of the state from North India is based on the condition of rural women. It is generally believed that the empowerment effects of MGNREGA would be observed more sharply in those states where women face poor socio-economic condition and their participation in social and economic development process traditionally has been found to be weak. According to secondary data in Utter Pradesh, the participation rate of household employment in the entire year 2011-2012 is 60.7% which is quite high in the data at all- India level. And also the participation rate of women in MGNREGA in Utter Pradesh is very less as compared to the other state. It is about only 17%, and if we see all India participation rates of women in MGNREGA in financial year 2011-2012, around, 49%. The data is showing through this graph

Significant Share of women workforce in current financial year 2011-2012, upto Dec 2011. National Average: 49%



(Source: www.nrega.nic.in)

This figure shows that the participation rate of women in MGNREGA in Uttar Pradesh is very less as compared to the other states. It is about only 17%, and if we see all India Participation rates of women in MGNREGA in financial year 2011-2012, around 49% of women got job in MGNREGA. Because of this reason, I chose Uttar- Pradesh as my case study.

3.2 Sampling Structure:

Selection of the block:

In the entire Uttar Pradesh the Participation rate of women in MGNREGA activities is higher in Arajiline Block which is around 2433 as compared to men which is around 4560 in 2011. It means that around 50% women got jobs in Arajiline Block. In others Blocks, the participation rate of women is only 18%. The higher rate of participation of women in Arajiline block gives more insight to do the field work and collect ample amount of data.

Selection of the village:

The researcher has chosen Jagardevpur village in Arajiline Block for study. The village is highly backward and deprived from the most of the civic amenities except the primary health care centre. The livelihood of the lower caste people in these villages mainly depend on daily wage earning. These factors play a major role in analyzing the status of women empowerment.

Time Frame/Period of Survey

The researcher has analyzed the data which has done on the field surveys over the months of October /November 2014 in the (Varanasi district) Jagardevpur village in the two phases. Firstly is 'the Pilot study' and secondly is 'the main field study'. The researcher also analyzes below whether to what extent MGNREGA has been able to contribute women's in the three dimension of empowerment like 'Education', 'Economical' and 'Political'. (Data has been collected in three stages in the same year).

4. Field Work Observation and the Case Study:

a). Education and Empowerment through MGNREGA: (Kumar & Varghese, 2005) see education is the primary means for empowerment. As per (Kishor and Gupta 2004), education may also enhance women economic independent by equipping them with necessary skills to take advantage to paid employment opportunity (all, as cited in Gupta & Yesudian, 2006). During the field work, the researcher observed that facility provided by MGNREGA has been found to contribute women's empowerment in terms of their education a well. So that the uneducated women's worker trying to get the knowledge through MGNREGA activities which is connected with women s education, knowledge and awareness. For instance, women were found to be aware that issuing of Job card and social audit, for instance "why the job card is necessary for them" and "how they get their job card. *"The 8th pass village*

women mala said that job card is my personal identification and this very useful for my ID proof. That is very necessary for me that's why I am working in MGNREGA".

Women's are very much aware about the social audit meeting. According to the rule of social audit, women's need to interact with officer directly and should be free to discuss their issues (related to MGNREGA) and problem. The researcher also tries to find out that if the rural women are able to interact with officers at the time of social audit? With the interaction to Gram Pradhan the researcher know about the policy of Social Audit which is benefited for women's. According to the rule of Audit, the women who have the degree of class 10th and 12th (decided by the block) are able to do the auditing in other villages. This is excellent work for village women for their exploration and interaction with Block level officers. Because of the rule, the women of this village are aware about the Audit Policy like attendance sheet, total work done in one day. Total work cover in one day.

b).Economic Empowerment through MGNREGA:

According to MRDE (2008), women constitute about 48.2% of the population and out of them around 80% of the women live in rural India. Their literacy level is low and they are mostly employed in unorganized sector or unpaid employments. Thus, MRDE (2008) rightly states that,

"The status of women in society depends on a large extent on economic empowerment. If women are earning independently in the household or if they have control over the productive and even non productive assets of household their value, esteem and even power of bargaining within the household, and in the community and the society at large increase".

During field work the researcher found that before MGNREGA women in the village of Jagardevpur were only agricultural labour in the village. There work was not only seasonal but they were also under paid - (about Rs 50/- per day) or (5 kg of food grains like wheat/rice). Since they did not have any other alternative and that's why they were compelled to work in the field. But the year 2009 was turning point in their life- MGNREGA started in their villages providing them not just an alternative for livelihood-but offered those better wages. MGNREGA also enhance the income of rural women. Women's who are working in MGNREGA were trying and working hard to contribute their economic contribution and relief for their family members.

The 45 years Urmila Devi said that.... *"Didi I am not literate but because of MGNREGA money and other source of income now I am educating my children's so that I don't need other to read for me.* Most of the women's are working 2 to 3 months in MGNREGA

and apart from that they are working as agricultural labor on the field of landlord. According to the researcher observation the government employment policy is very reliable as compared to landlord and other work in the village. Women's are getting 156 Rs. per day as per the government rule and they are getting money on time and here is no delay in the payment. That is the main reason that women's economic contribution to the family has been increased.

C). MGNREGA and Political Empowerment of Women:

The 73rd constitutional amendment act enacted in 1992 was a significant step in the empowering of women as it gave 1/3rd representation to women in the three tier system of local self-government politics at the village/ block/ district levels (Madan2002). From the women's perspective, women's participation at the local/district level of governance process/system is quite low in spite of 73rd and 74th amendment act of the constitution. But women's participation in politics at village/block level has increased after the implementation of MGNREGA in many areas. A large number of women workers attended the Gram Sabha meeting held with connection with MGNREGA. So community levels empowerment of women is one of the great achievements of this act [1].

After the field work and interaction with women's and various functionaries the researcher too agrees about the women's participation in the gram sabha meeting after implementation of MGNREGA. The gram pradhan is not supposed to take all the political decision in the gram sabha meeting. Different government schemes like MGNREGA and others project and planning promotes and gives space to rural women's to take a part in the gram sabha meetings. So during the field work the researcher interacted with those women who are really working in MGNREGA for last five years. According to village women's *we are attending the all village meetings because the situation has change not only because of MGNREGA. But because of awareness of government schemes, we are so much enthusiastic about the plan and projects which are running in the village. But at that time when MGNREGA had entered in our village, because of demand of work the participation rate of women has increased in gram sabha meeting.*

With the interaction of village women and gram pradhan the researcher found that the gram sabha meetings are regularly held twice in the year at panchayat bhawan. This meeting is locally known as *khuli baithak*. With the interaction of women researcher found that since last five to eight years the village women's are taking part in the meetings on large scale. They are very much interested in gram sabha meetings. In this meeting the gram pradhan is

providing many of the information's about the different scheme in the village. That is the main reason behind their presence in the meeting. The village women Rauti age 40 years SC women said that.....*We are attending gram Sabhas meeting regularly. After implementation of MGNREGA in 2009 this meeting is being regularly held in the village. With the presence of gram pradhan and rojgar sevek adikari the meeting is held on time in the village.*

According to the observation of researcher, earlier the women's of Jagardevpur women's feel shy in front of gram pradhan and other related officers in gram sabha meetings. Because of MGNREGA, women participation has been increased in gram sabha meeting but they (women's of Jagardevpur) are not very much vocal in front of them. Overall the researcher can conclude on the basis of the observation that there has been political awareness among the women's in the survey area and they are aware of their political rights but still a long way to go.

Conclusion:

To conclude my paper, we may say that earlier the women of this village feel hesitate to put their problem regarding related issues (like home, water, employment, wage) in front of gram pradhan and block officers. But now the situation has changed and they feel free to discuss their issues in front of them. Being the lower caste group the women who are working in MGNREGA always suppressed by the upper caste people and block officers. The members of their community had always been suppressed by the officers and even they can't utter even a word against them. The harijans of village are so scared that even they don't resist and oppose officers. They are more afraid because they work on upper caste land.

But MGNREGA has given the chance to interact with them. But now changes have taken place through still slow. Finally the researcher concludes that the rural poor women not only got the opportunity to do the work in their own village but it also enhanced women's confidence. Because of MGNREGA women's are able to speak in public domain and their participation has been increased in gram sabha meetings. Not only in public domain but also women's economic contribution has increased at their home and their knowledge has improved about the bank (like policy and different schemes). Before MGNREGA the rural poor SCs of Jagardevpur had no land and property and they are totally dependent on farmers and the latter exploited them so much. But after introduction of MGNREGA the exploitation has reduced in the village and their social relationship has changed. So finally the researcher can conclude that MGNREGA is not only employment generation scheme but it is giving so much opportunity to

women that why the women's who are working in MGNREGA feeling more confidence as compared to those women who are coming from upper caste who

are not working on the field. The upper caste women don't feel to work under MNREGA but they are also unable to break the shackles of patriarchal society.

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