

ROLE OF MGNREGA ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT – A CASE STUDY OF THE MANGALAPURAM GRAMAPANCHAYAT OF THIRUVANANTHAPURAM DISTRICT, KERALA

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ABSTRACT

The enactment of MGNREGA is a great milestone in the constitutional history of India. It ensures 100 days of unskilled work to the rural workforce of the country. The objective behind the Act was the eradication of rural poverty and unemployment thereby achieving rural empowerment. The present study was conducted in the Mangalapuram Gramapanchayat of Thiruvananthapuram district, Kerala to evaluate the role of MGNREGA on women empowerment. Both primary and secondary data sources were used in the study. A detailed questionnaire survey was conducted to collect primary data on MGNREGA and its role in the women's life. Results demonstrate that MGNREGA has a crucial role in social, economic, political, and educational empowerment of women.

KEYWORDS: MGNREGA, Rural Poverty, Women Empowerment, Mangalapuram, Unemployment

INTRODUCTION

Gender is a particularly important fact of identity that refers to the social differences between men and women rather than biological differences related to sex. We use the term gender to refer to socially created distinction between feminist and masculinity, while the term sex is used to refer to biological differences between men and women. However, when we talk about the geography of gender, we generally refer to feminist geography. Feminist geography is an approach to study in human geography, which applies the theory, methods and critics of feminism to the study of human empowerment and society. Its principal focus of the study is geographic differences in gender relations and gender equality. In addition to its analysis of the real world, it reflects on the geographical nature of the female experience. Feminist geography is part of a broad post-modern approach to the subject which is not permanently concerned with the development of conceptual theory in its self but rather focuses on the real experience of individuals and groups in their own localities, upon the geographies that they live in within their own communities. A feature of common to all feminist arguments is that the differences in social positions of men and women systematically work the advantage of men so that women and men have unequal power, opportunities and social status. Feminist geography aims at exposing the ways in which current practices in society hasn't changed in order to release women from the state of subordination (Rana L, 2008)

Feminist geography is concerned first and foremost with improving women's lives by understanding the sources, dynamics, and speciality of women, oppression, and documenting strategies of resistance. During the last couple of decades, feminist geography has provided very important contributions to new geographic understanding. Dixon and Jones

point out three basic headings under which we always list these research contributions.

- Gender as a difference which is addressing the different life experience of women and men in a number of cultural, economic, political and other areas.
- Gender as the social relation, which analyses how the relationship between males and females differ from place to place, between different cultures and changes over time.
- Gender as a social construction ,which is related to investigations of how concepts and metaphors are ‘gendered’ when concept is related to the traditional understanding of male or female characteristics

Feminist geography emerged in the first place out of the women’s liberation movement and was partly linked to radical geography. In the last decade, feminist geography has infused economic, political, urban and cultural geography with new perspectives and research approaches. One entry point here is the changing habitus of women brought about in diaspora cultures and in the transformation of traditional societies (Holt-Jensen A, 2004)

Women empowerment has been considered an effective tool to bring about changes in the socio-economic conditions of women. Women empowerment is defined as a process aimed at changing the nature and direction of systematic forces for marginalized women and other disadvantaged sections of the society. It essentially means that the women have the power or capacity to regulate their day-to-day lives in the social, political, and economic fields and it is a power enables them to move from periphery to the central stage. It also includes

- Having decision making the power of their own
- Having access to information and resources for taking a decision
- Having a range of options from which you can make the choice
- Ability to exercise assertiveness in collective decision making
- Having positive thinking on the ability to make change
- Ability to learn skills to improving one’s personal/group power
- Ability to change other’s perceptions by democratic means
- Involving the growth process and change that is never ending and self- initiated
- Increasing one’s positive self-image and overcoming the stigma

According to the United Nations, the women empowerment has five major components

- Women’s sense of self- worth
- Their right to have determined a choice
- Their right to have access to opportunities and resources
- Their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home
- Their ability to influence the direction of social changes to create a more just, social and economic order, both nationally and internationally.

The government of India has adopted the National Policy for Empowerment of women on 20th March 2001. The main objectives of this policy are to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women, to eliminate all the discriminations against women and to ensure their active participation in all spheres of life and activities.

In order to bring women empowerment, the emancipation of women from the various groups of social, economic, political, caste, and gender-based discrimination is a must. It means granting women the freedom to make life choices. So that women empowerment is possible whereby women became able to organize themselves to increase their own self-reliance, to assert their independent right to make choices and to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was passed by the Government of India in 2005 in this regard. MGNREGA has a positive impact on rural employment generation and development (Paul S, 2016). MGNREGA is a great milestone for the attainment of the women empowerment and bridging the gender imbalances at the household and community levels in rural areas (Salian P.V et al., 2014). There is a quite high level of potential for MGNREGA for the socio-economic and political empowerment of women (Shihabudheen N, 2013). It is the best programme for the economically backward districts in the country (Iqbal Z, 2017). MGNREGA has caused significant changes in women entrepreneurship and economic empowerment (Ahmad S et al., 2017). It is a great success in raising the level of employment and income of rural household women, thereby enhancing their purchasing power, satisfaction and confidence. It enhanced women's participation in gram sabha meetings (Singh S, 2015). As a result of MGNREGA the dependence of women on men started declining (Basavaraj S et al., 2017). The Kerala state particularly Thiruvananthapuram district has high women participation in MGNREGP. The present study was conducted to evaluate the effect of MGNREGA on women empowerment in the Mangalapuram Gramapanchayat of Thiruvananthapuram district.

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

Study Area

The Mangalapuram grama panchayat is located 23 km north from Trivandrum city in the west-central part of the Thiruvananthapuram district. The panchayat is a part of Chirayinkeezhu taluk and falls between the latitudes 8^o35' 49" N to 8^o40'20" N and in longitudes from 76^o49'30" E to 76^o 52'30" E. It has a total area of 21.66 square kilometers. The panchayat has a total population of 36956 in 2011 which constituted nearly 4.5% of the total population of the Thiruvananthapuram district. Out of the total population of the panchayat, nearly 54% are females. The panchayat has a literacy rate of 92.8% in 2011. But the female literacy rate was only 90.6%. Female workers in the panchayat are lesser than the male workers. Male and female workers occupied 74.5% and 25.5% respectively in 2011.

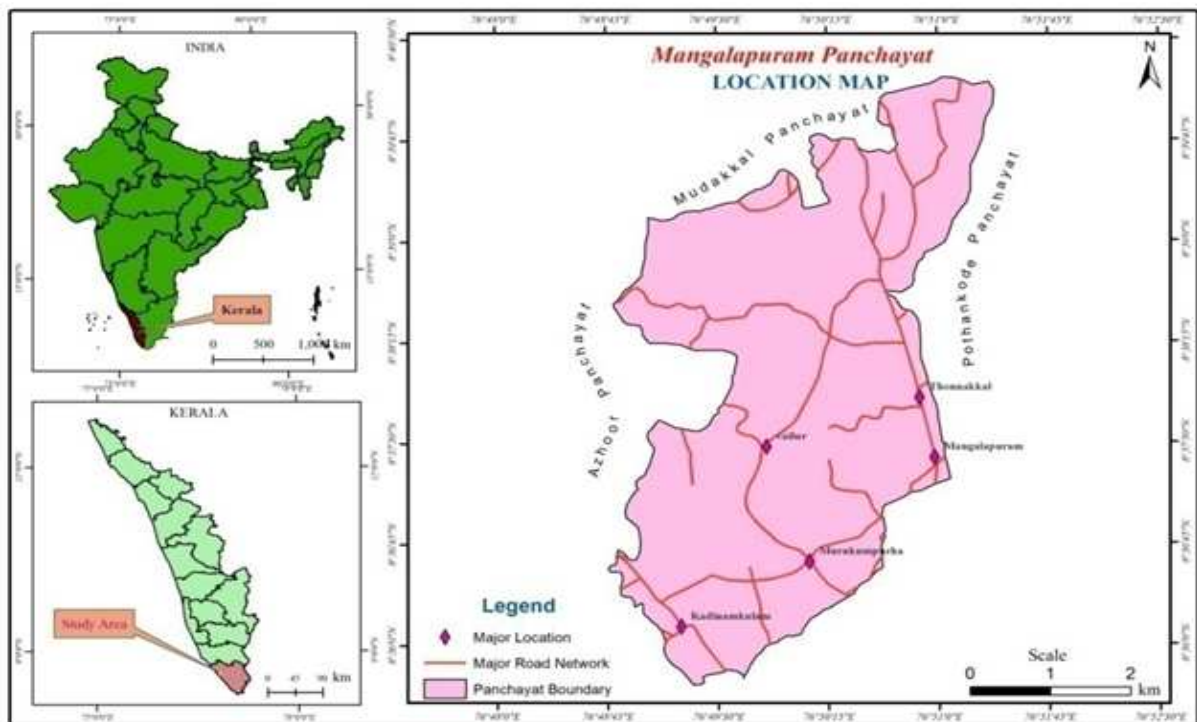


Figure 1

Methodology

Both primary and secondary data sources were incorporated in the present study. Panchayat ward boundary map and the details regarding the participants of MGNREGA were collected from the Mangalapuram gramapanchayat. District Census Handbook (DCH) published by the Directorate of Census Operations for the year 2011 was used for analyzing the demographic characteristics of the study area. A detailed questionnaire survey was conducted among 100 women participants (one from each household) to evaluate the effect of MGNREGA on women empowerment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results show that 34% of women who are participating in this scheme were belonged to the age group 40-50 followed by 50-60. The proportion of people engaged in MGNREGP who have more than 60 years of age occupied 22%. Married women among the participants constituted 99%. Among them, 30% of the workers are engaged in this scheme since its inception in 2006. Out of the total workers, 78% of the participants got their income properly.

Results show that most of the women have given the freedom to take decision in their family after joining in MGNREGP. They attributed this to the additional sources of income that they are given from the scheme. 80% of the workers are given the freedom to take a decisions on family-related matters and the education of their child. The remaining 20% argued no change in this aspect of women empowerment. Nearly 70% of their income is spending for the household affairs

Participation of women in the public programmes also increased due to their involvement in MGNREGP. After becoming a member of this scheme, 72% of the women had increased their participation in social programmes like marriage, kudumbashree etc. The remaining 28% percentage of workers are not showing any change in their social involvement

The analysis conveyed that, most of the people could use their part of income for medical expense. After their involvement in MGNREGP, 82% of the people got sufficient money for spending for medical-related purposes. They were of the opinion that MGNREGP has raised their capacity to visit hospitals at the time of diseases. Nearly 10% of their income is spending for medical purposes.

About 68% of the workers are of the opinion that MGNREGP has caused economic empowerment in their lives. Results indicated that, 52% of the women who are currently working under the MGNREGA programme did not have any other jobs before joining in the scheme. It clearly shows that the MGNREGA programme has provided them with more employment opportunities. Thus, MGNREGA has changed the financial background of the rural women. On an average out of the total income, nearly 70% are spending for household affairs, 20% for educational purposes and 10% for medical purposes.

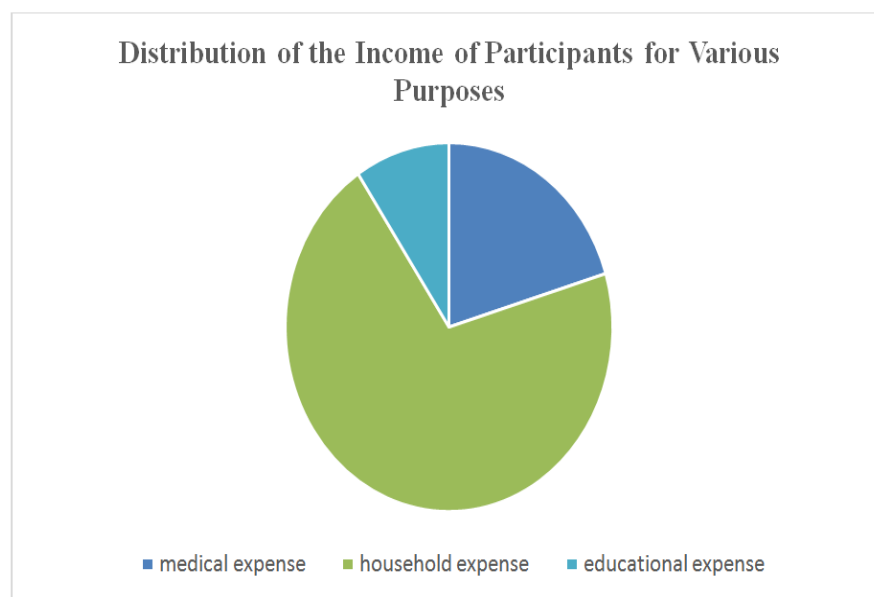


Figure 2

Results also indicated that nearly 62% of the families had BPL cards, and the rest 38% had APL financial status. This shows that the majority of the participants under this scheme belonged to the category of under the poverty line. Thus, the earning of income through this scheme has played a crucial role in eradicating the rural poverty. Results also showed that nearly 64% of the women workers were given self-sufficiency after joining in the programme. There were 8 widows in the participants and who were of the opinion that the main source of income in their family is MGNREGA and thus we can clearly say that the MGNREGA has caused the women to be self-reliant and independent.

The MGNREGA provides 100 days of unskilled working days. However, only 16% of the participants were given the 100 working days and 26% got 60 days. This shows the inefficiency of the programme to provide its goal of 100 days of unskilled job days.

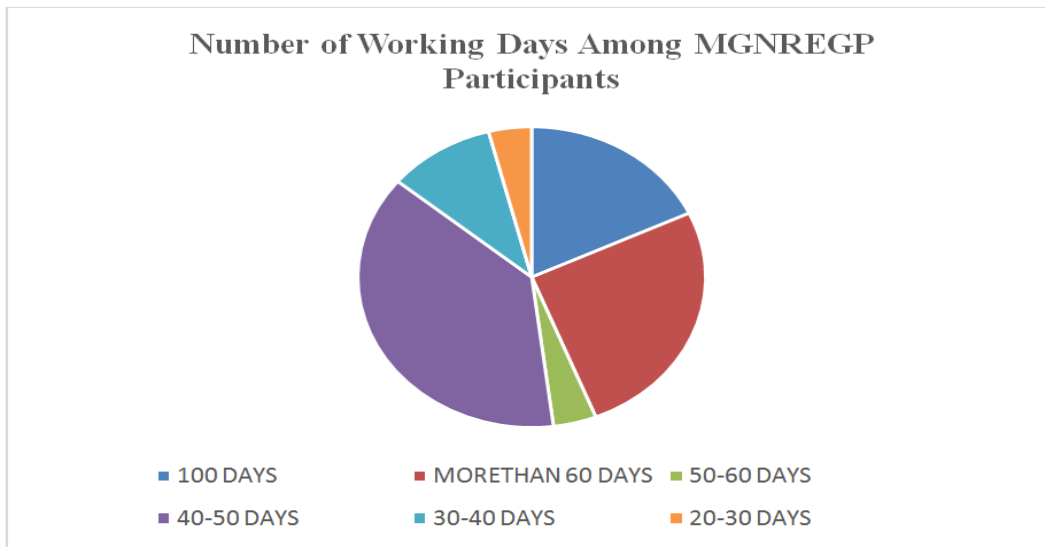


Figure 3

This programme also caused the rural poor women to have a bank account in a public sector bank. About 48% of women did not have their own bank account before joining in MGNREGA. They were given free bank accounts after joining in MGNREGA.

About 92% of the women are going to the Gram Sabhas properly after joining in MGNREGA. It indicates a keynote change in their political status and provides important knowledge about the policies which the government provides to the underdeveloped rural population to overcome their ill development status. Just because of the implementation of the programme MGNREGA, the political relationship status of common people, mainly the women increased very much. About 72% of the women have a good relationship with the authority and officers, panchayat presidents and other local politicians like ward members.

Results also revealed that 68% of women could use a part of their wages for their children's educational purpose. As a result of their participation in the MGNREGA programme, 50% of women got awareness about various social welfare programmes offered by the government for the financially backward sections. It also revealed that 78% of women participants have a good knowledge about their 'Thozhil card' (Job Card), which was provided by the authority, the remaining 22% of women still does not have any idea about it. The results also show that 66% of the women can now deal the account related matters in the bank without others help. These aspects clearly show the impact of MGNREGA on women's educational empowerment.

CONCLUSIONS

MGNREGA has a crucial role in the empowerment of rural women. Among the participants of MGNREGA, the most dominated age group was 40-50. Among them, 99% was married. Results showed that 78% of the total participants got their wages properly at time. Results also demonstrated that MGNREGA has increased their ability to take decisions in household related matters. Most of their income was spending for household affairs. It also increased their participation in social programmes. MGNREGA has enhanced their capacity to spend money for medical related aspects. It also provided them with economic empowerment. Most of the participants were BPL cardholders, thus, it played a crucial role in eradicating rural poverty. It provided them with self-sufficiency, self-pride and self-reliance.

Most of the people who were participating in this scheme got a bank account after joining this programme. It also provided them with educational empowerment. Currently, they can spend more money for the education of their child. MGNREGA has increased their knowledge related to banking and the social welfare schemes. It strengthened their relationship with politicians, thus, making them politically empowered. The present study pointed out that MGNREGA has a crucial role in empowering the rural women.

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