



## Politics of rural development and poverty alleviation: Mahatma Gandhi national rural employment guarantee programmes in Birbhum district of Westbengal

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### Abstract

To bring the livelihood security in the lives of rural poor, there have been several employment schemes in the past like Employment Assurance Schemes (EAS), National Rural Employment Programme (NREP), Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY), Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY) etc. However the MGNREGA was passed on 23rd August 2005 by Indian Parliament with an aim to enhance the livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of employment in a financial year to the rural households who are volunteer to do unskilled manual works. The State WestBengal also adopted MGNERAGA as an instrument of rural development and employment generation from the beginning of Eleventh Five Year Plan. The Act was extended to the state West Bengal from 11th May 2007 and was implemented in various phases; however in April 2008 the Act covered the whole state. The present study throws the light by adopting descriptive research design on the employment provided by MGNREGA and its impact in the Birbhum district of West Bengal.

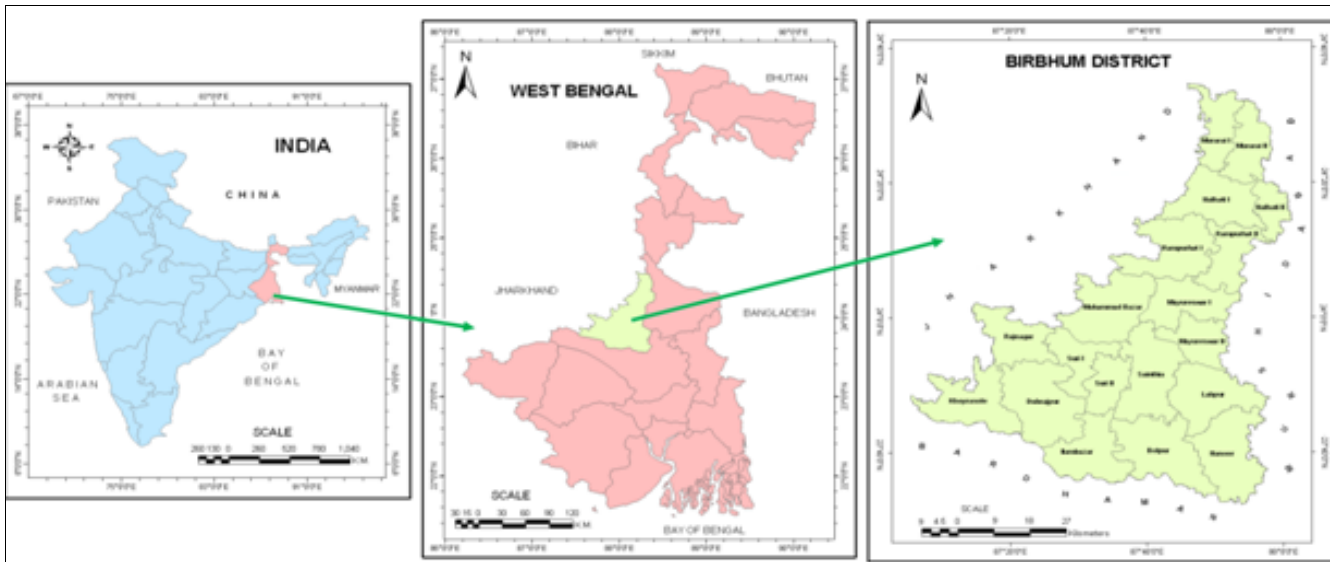
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### Introduction

Employment is a social issue and main source of livelihood in India. Lack of access to employment leads challenge to basic needs of individual and family. Unemployment lowers selfesteem and can direct towards social instability. Therefore, it is important to work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity for all men and women. In country like India over half the work force continues to depend on the agriculture. This creates a huge gap in productivity and incomes between agriculture and non-agriculture sectors. This is mainly due to insufficient growth of productive employment opportunities outside agriculture. Agricultural labourers do not get employment throughout the year and they are subject to unemployment and underemployment during off seasonal employment. Government of India has already launched anti-poverty programmes in order to decrease rural poverty and increase level of employment, income and standard of living of rural poor people. Most of them have failed to bring any livelihood security to the rural poor people. However in recent years Central Government of India introduced Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), passed by Indian Parliament on 23rd August 2005. The Act is designed to provide job guarantee for minimum 100 days and if employment is not provided within 15 days, an than 6 days in week. MGNREGA was

primarily called the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) but was renamed on 2nd October 2009. MGNREGA mandates 33 percent participation for women. Even though MGNREGA succeeds to decline the level of rural unemployment by providing a legal guarantee to work and labourers cannot count on employment being provided to them during the lean season. An employment guarantee gives labourers more confidence in the prospect of local employment, and discourages seasonal migration. Schemes may come and go and can be trimmed and cancelled by an official order whereas MGNREGA requires an amendment in parliament because it is not merely a scheme but an Act under which the workers have durable legal right and have to learn how to claim their due. Hence marks a paradigm shift from all earlier and existing welfare wage employment programmers. Bulk of unemployed labourer and disparities among agricultural labourers are main research problem discovered in the study area. The employment status of Birbhum district has been visualized by self-employed in agricultural sector, self employed in non-agriculture sector, employed as regular wage/salaried employees in agriculture sector, and employed as regular wages/salaried employees in non-agriculture sector.

### Location of the study area



**Fig 1:** Location Map of the Study Area

Birbhum ( $23^{\circ} 32' 30''$  and  $24^{\circ} 35' 0''$ N and  $88^{\circ} 1' 40''$  and  $87^{\circ} 5' 25''$  E) extends over 4545 Km<sup>2</sup>. Birbhum is bounded on the north and west by the Santal Parganas of Jharkhand state and the district of Murshidabad; on the east by the districts of Murshidabad and Burdwan; and on the south by Burdwan, from which it is separated by the Ajoy river. Administratively, it comprises of three Sub-divisions (Suri, Bolpur and Rampurhat), 19 Community Development blocks and 2,467 villages.

**Literature Review**

*Chitra and Ganesan (2013)* [2] examined the implication of MGNREGA activities in rural employment opportunities. The study exposed that MGNREGA helps to the agricultural labourers in the off season but wages and number of days of employment provided are very low. So, it is necessary to increase the wage rate and number of days of employment.

*Ahuja et al. (2011)* [1] studied the impact of MGNREGA on rural employment and migration. The study revealed that the farmers who have small land and livestock resources are more inclined to work in MGNREGA and their participation is also more as compared to the farmers owning large size of landholdings and more number of livestock.

*Dreze et al. (2008)* argued that Rajasthan generated highest number of average employment days per rural household under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) scheme. In six NREGA districts of Rajasthan, the average rural household worked more than 77 days during a financial year under this scheme.

According to a study by *Mukherjee et al. (2010)* [14] in Birbhum district, the average number of employment-days generated per household and the utilisation of funds varies considerably across the blocks. They found that out of 19 blocks, only 6 blocks could provide more than 25 days of employment and other 6 blocks being less than 15.

A study by *Shariff (2013)*, based on major states in India, reveals that there exists a large variation within and across states with respect to the NREGA works and the average

number of employment days generated. Both in terms of having a better coverage and creating a relatively larger number of employment per household, states like Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh can be considered as success stories of NREGS in India.

*Ambasta et al. (2012)* [10] have suggested several significant recommendations. They have proposed deployment of full-time professionals dedicated to NREGA at all levels, especially at the block level.

*Hirway et al. (2014)* [12] however point out that there has been some tangible success of the scheme at village level in terms of construction of a number of common and private productive assets in some successful pockets.

*Mehrotra (2016)* [13] observed that the number of person-days of work provided per household (by those households who demanded work) was 43 days on average in India as a whole.

In a *Comprehensive Assessment Report (2014)* [11] of the NREGS done by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), Delhi, it is stressed that with proper focus on the creation of productive assets, the scheme has the potential of reinvigorating the village economy.

*Moitri (2010)* [3] investigated the national rural employment guarantee act (NREGA) and explore that in the era Globalisation everyone is talking about socio economic changes and in India the Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation (LPG) era is characterized by a high economic growth rate (at 6%) which is termed as the jobless era with only 1% of job growth.

**Methodology**

The study is based on both the primary and secondary data. The secondary data relevant for the study are taken from the NREGA website. The samples under this study are taken from Birbhum district of West Bengal state. Total numbers of samples are 438, selected on convenient sampling basis. Among which 361 are Male workers and 77 are Female workers. Researcher with the help of stratified random

sampling method selected 16% i.e. 70 respondents of total registered workers. The responses of respondent were collected with the help of interview schedule and observation techniques. Review schedule includes both open and close ended questions to understand the perception of respondents.

**Objectives of the study**

In this perspective, it seems imperative

- To study the employment days and fund utilization status across the blocks in Birbhum district.
- To examine satisfaction of respondents concerning with employment provided by the MGNREGA.
- To analyze the availability of work under MGNREGA.
- To assess the impact of MGNREGA on other unskilled manual work.
- To measure the perception of respondents about the work opportunity and wages provided by other agency.

**Results and Discussion**

The following Table 1 provides a synoptic view of the block level relative fund utilization and achievement status. The average number of employment days created for the Birbhum district during 2009-10 had been 22.29. Amongst the 19 blocks 12 performed below this district level in terms of generating employment days per household. The worst performers at this level had been Nalhathi-I, Khoyrasole and Nanoor. Considering the district level value of 22.29 as the bench mark figure, among the 7 better performing blocks the top three during this year were Rampurhat-II, Mayureswar-I and Mayureswar-II. Accordingly lowest employment days per household was noted as 12.78 and highest 33.78. Considering the year 2010-11, the number of employment days per household for the district as a whole was found to be 26.25. Among the 19 blocks 10 were recorded as performing below the district level average with

the lowest being 16.65 in case of Nalhathi-I. Among the rest 9 better performing blocks the best three were Rajnagar, Rampurhat-II and Rampurhat-I with Rajnagar recording the highest number (41.96) of employment days per household. Similarly focusing on the year 2011-12, we find that there were 12 blocks having generated below the district level employment days per household (36.04). Among these the lowest number i.e., 26.01 was recorded by Nalhathi-I. For the residual 7 better performing blocks the first three positions were captured by Rampurhat-II, Rampurhat-I and Bolpur-Sriniketan with Rampurhat- II registering the highest employment days per household at 62.12. Repeating the same analysis, it is observed that for the year 2012-13, there were 9 blocks generating employment days per household below the district level average of 42.59. Amongst these lowest value (28.36) was recorded in case of Nalhathi-I. Accordingly there were 10 better performing blocks compared to block average, amongst which the top 3 positions were recorded by Rajnagar (64.40), followed by Rampurhat-I and Rampurhat- II. On the whole, looking at the year-wise worst and better performing blocks, it can be said that special attention need to be given to Nalhathi-I while Rampurhat-II and Rampurhat-I stand at highly advantageous position. What is satisfying is that out of 19 blocks, 15 blocks have registered consistently rising number of employment days per household over the four consecutive years. In case of blocks like Dubrajpur, Khoyrasole, Mohammad Bazar, Murarai-I, Nalhathi-I and Nalhathi-II, the number of employment days per household is lower than the district level for all the years, while the employment days is higher for the blocks Mayureswar-II, Rampurhat-I and Rampurhat-II. In terms of fund utilization across the blocks we find that while some blocks are reported to have utilized more than 100% of the funds, there are some who lag far behind. In the financial year 2009- 10, only Murarai-I block have utilized more than the allotted fund.

**Table 1:** Year-wise fund utilization and generation of employment days per household in Birbhum district.

Block	Fund-Utilization				Employment Days\HH			
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2009	2010	2011	2012
BOLPUR-SRINIKETAN	45.26	121.92	100.25	99.97	17.37	23.33	47.29	49.13
DUBRAJPUR	70.70	149.18	108.71	99.69	21.24	24.73	31.85	40.65
ILLAMBAZAR	57.60	111.84	121.23	98.73	18.21	24.39	35.21	44.60
KHOYRASOL	52.00	61.65	107.89	97.40	12.86	20.35	29.40	39.84
LABPUR	43.48	115.72	103.15	99.31	23.28	23.69	34.59	34.90
MAYURESWAR-I	71.02	128.03	109.44	99.89	32.31	30.39	29.48	30.46
MAYURESWAR-II	69.63	123.73	104.85	98.08	30.87	32.50	41.98	44.12
MOHAMMAD BAZAR	63.39	75.70	113.15	99.10	19.86	23.40	32.15	41.50
MURARAI-I	246.71	106.37	115.30	100.54	18.98	20.83	31.77	39.64
MURARAI-II	31.31	62.58	87.61	100.63	28.28	30.40	36.57	41.41
NALHATHI-I	68.57	77.80	98.60	98.66	12.78	16.56	26.01	28.36
NALHATHI-II	12.43	99.98	116.00	98.36	18.90	22.40	32.60	31.32
NANOOR	89.71	120.37	97.65	100.19	16.89	20.87	32.23	45.89
DUBRAJPUR	70.70	149.18	108.71	99.69	21.24	24.73	31.85	40.65
RAJNAGAR	24.17	134.09	115.42	99.86	27.74	41.96	41.28	64.40
RAMPURHAT-I	42.31	131.98	105.75	99.45	27.06	34.09	49.97	58.87
RAMPURHAT-II	52.98	105.78	73.37	99.38	33.78	40.88	62.12	54.99
SAINTHIA	42.18	108.21	89.40	99.00	24.17	28.06	32.79	45.43
SURI-I	33.57	142.51	93.08	97.36	25.59	32.31	32.91	49.35
SURI-II	51.61	128.15	124.90	97.10	21.49	28.30	37.51	43.42
District Total	62.05	111.13	102.45	99.24	22.29	26.25	36.04	42.59
Standard Deviation	48.59	25.50	12.71	1.05	6.17	6.87	8.64	9.27

Source: Author calculation based on NREGA website

Murarai-II recorded the lowest level (12.43) of fund utilization. During the financial year 2010-11, out of 19 blocks 5 blocks like Khoyrasol, Mohammad Bazar, Murarai-II, Nalhati-I and Nalhati-II have utilized below the 100% level. Dubrajpur secured the top Position. In case of the year 2011-12, out of 19 blocks 6 blocks performed below the 100% limit, among which Rampurhat-II got the last position. In the financial year 2012-13, out of 19 blocks

3 blocks like Murarai-I, Murarai-II and Nanoor utilized just the available amount of fund, while the remaining blocks performed close to the sanctioned amount.

As a part of analysis and interpretation, collected data has classified, analysed and tabulated in a simplified manner. Simple percentage method and Chi-square test has adopted in present study to measure the association between respondents and employment provide by MGNREGA.

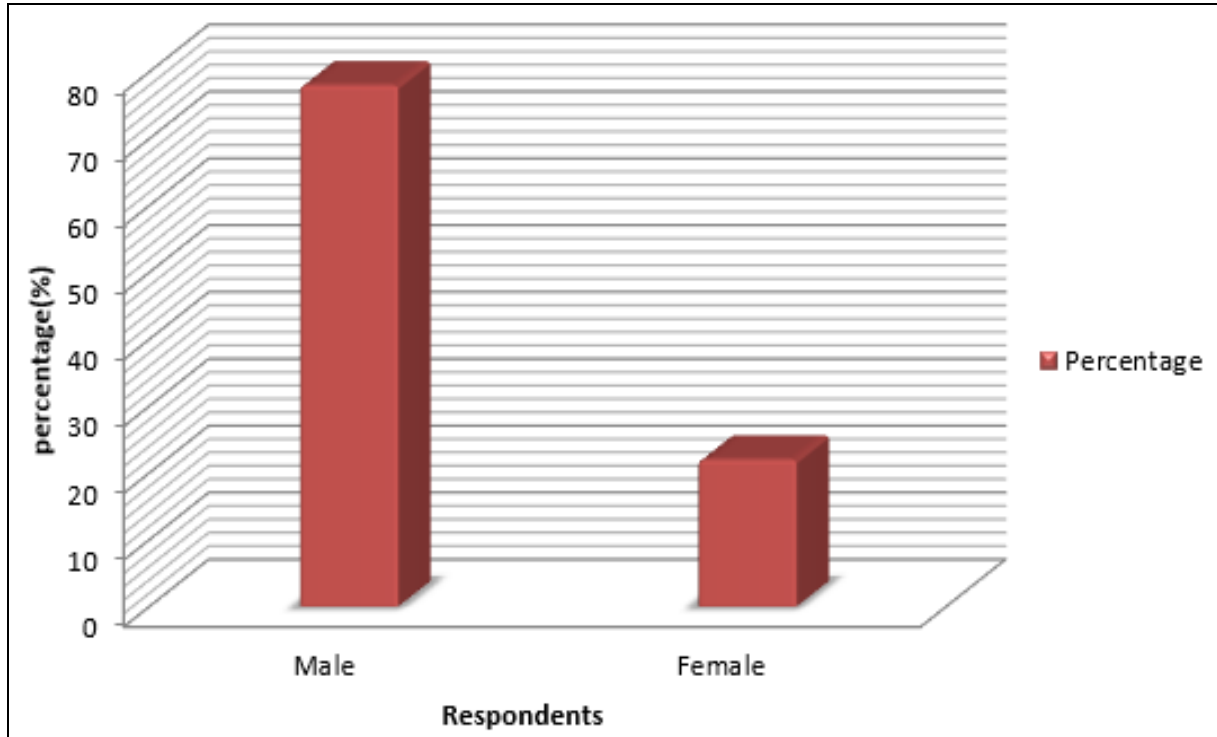


Fig 2: Gender distribution of respondents

From the field investigation it has been found that MGNREGA is functioning for strengthen the rural livelihood by providing employment opportunity to rural households without any discrimination of caste, religion and sex. fig-1 depicts major part (78.6%) of the MGNREGA workers are male members and the participation of female members (21.4%) seems below mandatory level. Reason

behind this low participation is that in the study area usually male members are working for their family and women mostly doing household works. Further it has been found that majority (40%) of respondent occupies monthly income group of 3001- 4000 and lowest (14.3%) of respondent lives in the income group of 2000 - 3000.

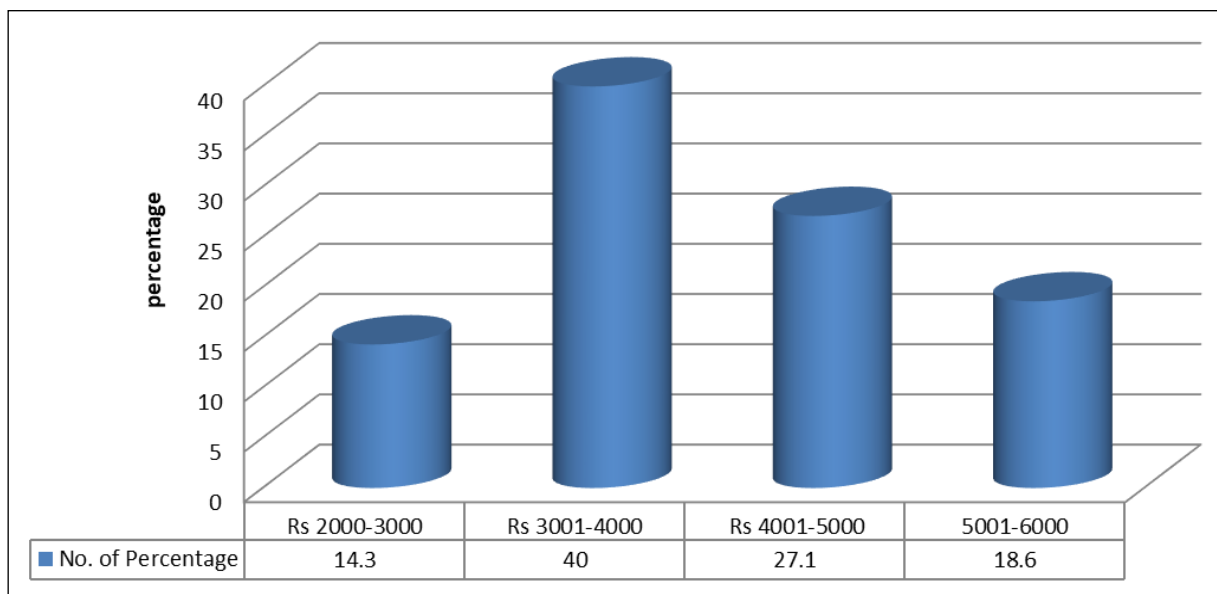


Fig 3: Monthly income of the respondents

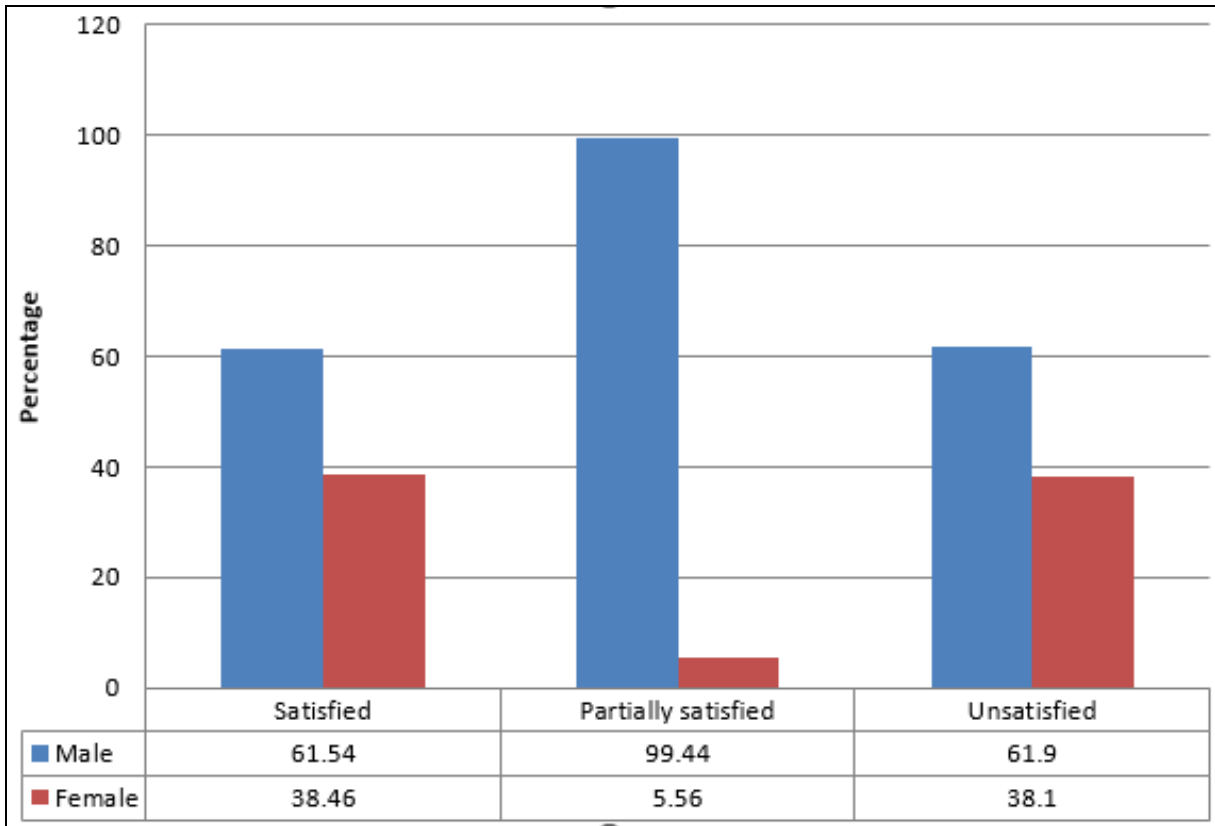


Fig 4: Gender wise Respondents view on satisfaction of employment

Figure-4 presents gender wise satisfaction of respondents with employment provided by MGNREGA. Majority (94.44%) of male respondents are partially satisfied. (61.90%) of male respondents are unsatisfied and the rest of male respondents are satisfied with employment opportunity provided by the MGNREGA. Among female respondents greater part (38.46%) are satisfied. However (38.10%) of female respondents are unsatisfied and rest of them are

satisfied. Both male and female respondents are of the view that 100 days of employment in a year are not sufficient to meet the basic needs of their family as day by day the family needs are increasing. However the percentage of female satisfaction is more than male satisfaction, it is only because female respondents experience more security and equity under MGNREGA.

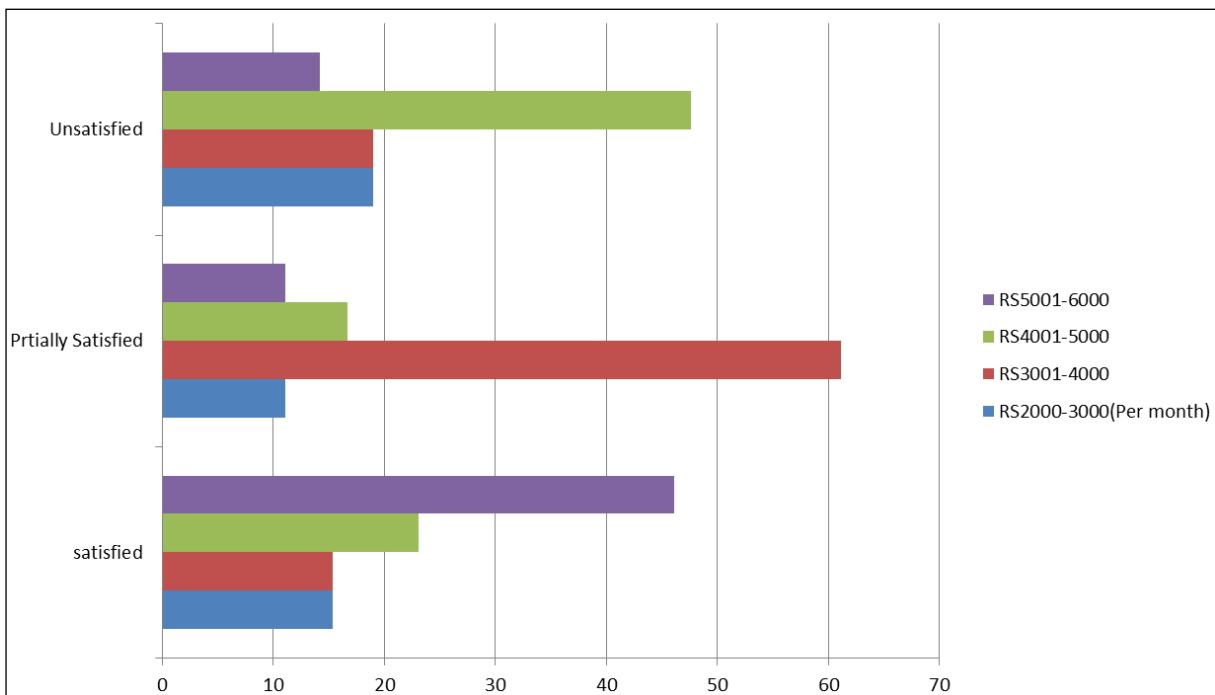


Fig 5: Income wise Respondents view on satisfaction of employment

Figure-5 explains income wise satisfaction of respondents with employment provided by MGNREGA. Major portion (61.11 %) of income group 3001–4000 is partially satisfied and (47.62 %) of income group 4001 –5000 is unsatisfied with employment provided by MGNREGA. Further great part (46.15 %) of income group 5001–6000 is satisfied and major (19.04 %) of income group 2000-3000 is unsatisfied with the employment opportunity provided of MGNREGA. Figure-6 illustrates gender and seasonal opportunity of work provided by MGNREGA. Majority (89.19 %) of male respondents are working in lean season, (83.33 %) of male respondents are working in peak season and rest of them are working in both lean and peak season. However among female respondents majority (42.86 %) are working in both peak and lean season, (16.67 %) of female respondents are working in peak season and rest of them are working in lean season under MGNREGA.

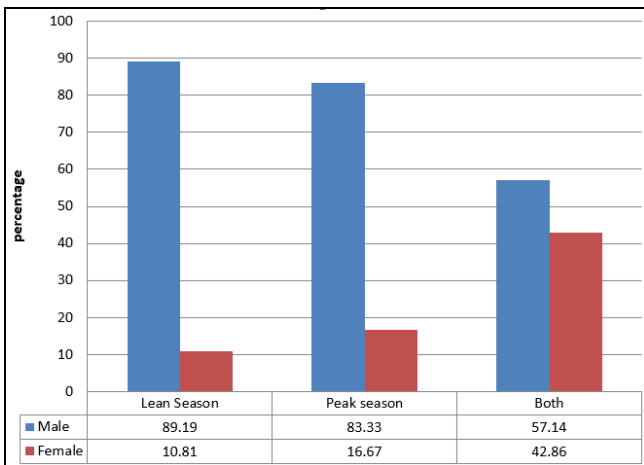


Fig 6: Gender wise Respondents views on opportunity of work provided by MGNREGA

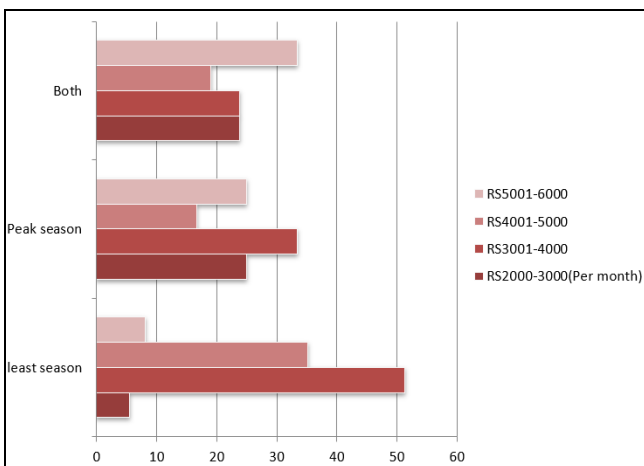


Fig 7: Income wise Respondents views on opportunity of work provided by MGNREGA

Figure7 reveals income wise respondents view concerning with seasonal employment provided by MGNREGA. Majority (51.35 %) of income group 3001–4000 is working in the lean season and major part (35.14 %) of income group 4001–5000 is of same opinion. Further major segment (33.33 %) of income group 5001–6000 is working in both seasons and great part (25.00 %) of income group 2000–3000 is working in peak season under MGNREGA.

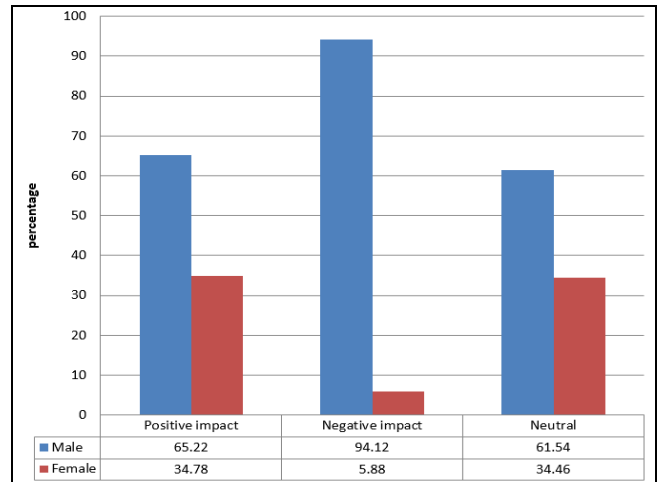


Fig 8: Gender wise Respondents views on Impact of MGNREGA on other unskilled manual work

Figure-8 describes gender wise impact of MGNREGA on other unskilled manual work. Major part (94.12%) of male respondents express negative impact, (65.22%) of male respondents say positive impact and rest of them state neutral impact of MGNREGA on other unskilled manual work. On the other hand great part (38.46%) of female respondents declares neutral impact, (34.78%) of female respondents assert positive impact and rest of them stress negative impact of MGNREGA on other unskilled manual work.

Figure-9 illustrates income wise impact of MGNREGA on other unskilled manual work. Highest (69.56%) of income group 3001–4000 state positive impact and major (41.18%) of income group 4001–5000 assert negative impact of MGNREGA on other unskilled manual work. In addition large section (38.45 %) of income group 5001–6000 say neutral impact and maximum (30.77%) of income group 2000–3000 also declares neutral the impact of MGNREGA on other unskilled manual work.

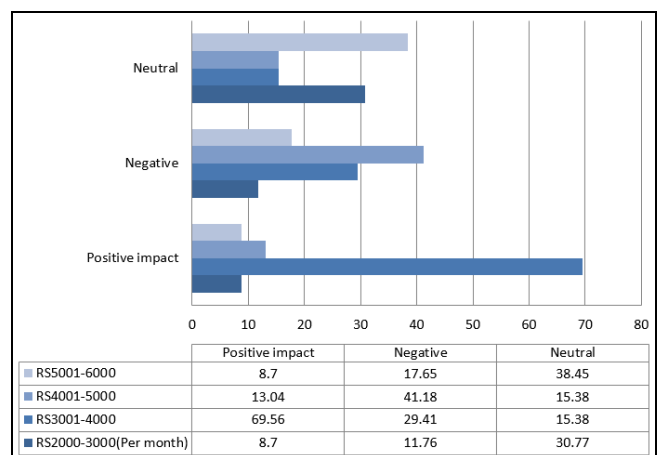
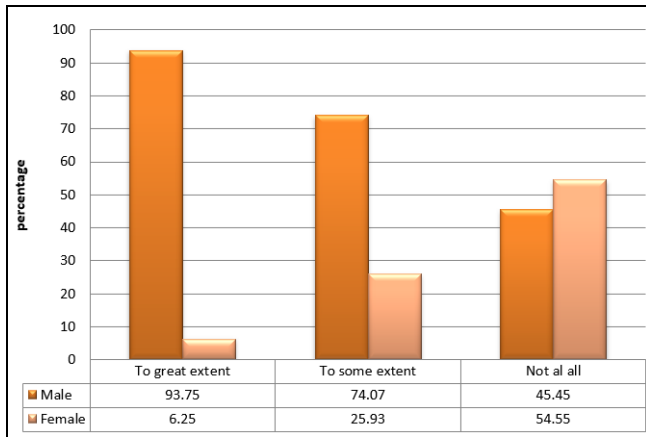
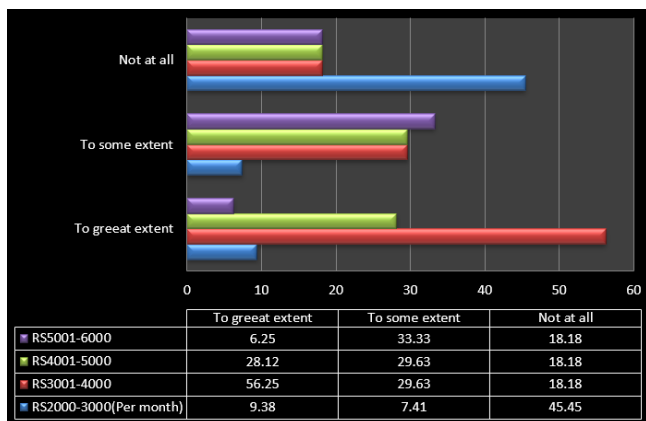


Fig 9: Income wise Respondents views on Impact of MGNREGA on other unskilled manual work



**Fig 10:** Gender wise Respondents views on more work and more wages by other agency

Figure 10 interprets gender wise response of respondents in relation to more work and more wages. Among male respondents great part (93.75%) say to great extent, (74.07%) declare to some extent and rest of them state not at all about more work and more wages provided by other agency. On other side large segment (54.55%) of female respondents claim not at all, (25.93%) affirm to some extent and rest of them insist to great extent regarding the more work and more wages provided by other agency.



**Fig 11:** Income wise Respondents views on more work and more wages by other agency

Figure-11 depicts income wise distribution of respondents concerning with more work and more wages. Major part (56.25 %) of income group 3001-4000 assert to great extent and highest (45.45 %) of income group 2000-3000 claim not at all regarding more work and more wages provided by other agency. Further larger section (33.33 %) of income group 5001- 6000 state to some extent and great portion (29.63 %) of income group 4001-5000 also declares to some extent with reference to more work and more wages provided by other agency.

From present study it is openly observed that there is considerable gap in participation of male and female workers under the scheme MGNREGA. The participation level of female workers is very low i.e. only 21.4 percent. Main occupation of workers is agricultural work, most of respondents are married and large section of respondents has Rs 4001-5000 monthly income. Further in view of employment provided by MGNREGA major portion 94.44 percent of male workers are partially satisfied and major segment 38.46 percent of female workers are satisfied.

However satisfaction of employment under MGNREGA among workers varies as per their monthly income, major portion 61.11 percent of workers in income group of 3001-4000 are partially satisfied and great part 46.15 percent of workers in income group of 5001-6000 are Satisfied. In addition major part 89.19 percent of male workers got employment in lean season and among female workers highest 42.86 percent got employment in both peak and lean season.

Income group of 3001-4000 state first position 51.35 percent over availability of work in lean season. Moreover large segment 94.12 percent of male workers shared negative impact and highest 38.46 percent of female workers expressed neutral impact of MGNREGA on other unskilled manual work. Major 69.56 percent of workers in income group of 3001-4000 avowed positive impact of MGNREGA on other unskilled manual work. In respect of more work and more wages by other agency most of male workers 93.75 percent confirmed to great extent while as major part 54.55 percent of female workers declared not at all. Further in income group of 3001-4000 most of respondents 56.25 percent affirmed to get more work and wages outside MGNREGA.

**Conclusion**

Since independence various welfare programmes has become an issue of concern to strengthen the rural livelihood by providing an employment opportunity to rural poor. Unlike these welfare programmes MGNREGA stands at its different as it is an Act not only a scheme which provides 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every rural household whose adult members want to do unskilled manual work. This guarantee to work develops more confidence and self-esteem among labour workers especially among women labour workers. Agricultural labourers mostly remain out of work during lean season but at the same time they work under MGNREGA and defer the seasonal migration. Hence results in decline of unemployment by providing a local employment to rural people especially in the lean season. Although MGNREGA do well to accomplish the rural unemployment since from its inception in study area but at the same time disparity in providing working days opportunity and unemployment allowance generates gap between workers and MGNREGA. Participation of women still seems a distant dream of MGNREGA’s achievement because participation of women is below the mandatory level (i.e. 33 % reservation). Therefore present study suggests that employment provided by MGNREGA should be given as per rules and regulations of the Act and unemployment allowance should be offered without any discrimination and delay. Further to attract more workers towards MGNREGA there is need to increase working days opportunity, wage rate and it is an obligation to spread awareness among village people to increase participation of women workers in the study area.

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