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***MGNREGA's Impact on the  
Empowerment of India's Marginalised  
Groups in the Labour Market.***

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## Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university, and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by any other person except where due reference is made in the text.

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*Rababhussain*

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## Abstract

*The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is a rights-based job guarantee program in India which is directed at the underprivileged populations of India, such as women, Scheduled Castes, and Scheduled Tribes, with the goal of reducing poverty and unemployment and providing them with a better empowered livelihood. However, since its inception it has been plagued by a slew of problems, raising strong reservations about its ability to achieve its stated goals.*

*This thesis examines the lives of the Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, and women in India and within the Indian labour market. The success of MGNREGA in generating an empowered livelihood for marginalised populations is also examined in this study, utilising three criteria's: equitable implementation of the Act, MNREGA and Women's Empowerment, and the value of MGNREGA awareness in terms of empowerment. Through a series of case studies, this thesis argued that each state has its own set of difficulties, making no two states the same. It was also argued that the MGNREGA is far from realising its full potential because it is not executed equitably, does not empower women and the SC/ST across India as it should, is not gender sensitive, and does not have high levels of awareness in all states.*

## List of Acronyms

MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
SC	Scheduled Caste
ST	Scheduled Tribe
BPL	Below Poverty Line
SoR	Schedule of Rate
NREP	National Rural Jobs Program
RLEGP	Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Program
JRY	Jawahar Rozgar Yojan
EAS	Employment Assurance Scheme
JGSY	Jawahar Gram Samaridhi Yojana
SGRY	Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yogana
NREGA	National Rural Employment Guarantee Act

## Chapter 1. Introduction

This thesis examines the extent of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act's (MGNREGA) contribution towards empowering the scheduled caste (SC), scheduled tribe (ST), and women who are considered the marginalized communities in India, and the challenges they face in achieving empowerment. The thesis contends that although MGNREGA was introduced to empower marginalised groups and provide them with a better and improved livelihood, it fails to attain its goals as it lacks high levels awareness, is not gender sensitive, and is not executed equitably to benefit SC/ST and women.

This chapter will start of by providing the study's research question along with its argument, objectives, and methodology. Next this chapter would establish the foundation for understanding MGNREGA's contribution towards empowering the aforementioned marginalised communities, and the challenges they face, by describing the Indian caste structure and its impact on the SC, ST, and women. It then goes on to explain the concept of women's empowerment and how it relates to MGNREGA, along with MGNREGA's history.

### 1.1 Research Questions

The thesis's primary research question is:

*Does MGNREGA empower the scheduled caste, scheduled tribe, and women?*

MGNREGA has measures enacted to empower the ST/SC and women in order to attain a better living for them, and while it has achieved to some level, it is far from totally empowering such underprivileged people. The thesis will answer the following sub questions in order to answer the primary research question.

1. Why is caste and gender a factor in the lack of empowerment of SC/ST and women under MGNREGA?
2. Should the MGNREGA implementation procedure be changed or improved?
3. What aspects require such adjustments and enhancements if they are required?



## 1.2 Argument and Objective.

The argument of this study is that despite the fact that MGNREGA was designed to empower marginalised groups and give them a better and improved livelihood, it fails to achieve its objectives

MGNREGA is an ambitious rural employment initiative, however its implementation, like that of other employment programmes, is not without flaws. The overall goal of this research is to highlight the various challenges that the SC, ST, and women populations experience with regards to achieving a better livelihood under the concept of empowerment, and to evaluate how well MGNREGA has addressed these issues.

Although having a job might help you become financially independent, it is not the only aspect that can help you feel empowered. Financial independence is only one aspect that leads to empowerment. Since there are many others that contribute to empowerment, such as awareness, equity, and gender equality, this thesis will also argue that gender inequality, lack of awareness and lack of equitable implementation of MGNREGA affect the empowerment of the SC/ST, and women.

## 1.3 Research Methodology

This study is a qualitative examination of the evolution and development of MGNREGA, and its primary purpose is to make an assessment of whether the act empowers the SC/ST and women in the Indian community; whether it does in fact provide them with a better livelihood.

In order to do that I will be using both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources that have been collected include the Indian constitution and documents from the official MGNREGA website, while the secondary sources include scholarship that highlight the issues of MGNREGA with regards to empowerment that have been referred to in understanding the challenges faced by the marginalized communities across India.

This thesis also uses case study methodology that “excels at bringing us to an understanding of a complex issue or object and can extend experience or add strength to what is already known through previous research” (Soy, 1997). As MGNREGA is an employment guarantee act that is applicable to all the states of India and not one particular state a multiple case study approach has been used in this thesis.

## 1.4 Indian Caste System

Many major social standards in India are linked to the caste system, which has a direct or indirect impact on Indian society. By birth, a person is assigned to a caste, and a person's caste determined his or her work and social rank in India (Sengupta et.al, 2008).

A caste is a small, identified group of people defined by intra-group marriage, hereditary membership, and a distinct way of life, such as ritual status or a certain occupation. The caste system in Hindu civilisation was divided into Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaisyas (traders), Sudras (menial labourers), and Ati Sudras, according to Hindu holy texts (the former untouchables who engaged in the most menial jobs). Traditionally, the high castes held a lot of land and authority, while the lower

castes served the dominant classes. As a result, the lower castes were largely associated with the poor (Kijima, 2006). The Dalits (Scheduled caste) were segregated from the rest of Hindus as the SC was considered to be untouchables. Their social exclusion was exacerbated by their lack of land and extreme poverty, which was compounded by the rationale offered by religion. (Banerjee and Knight, 1985).

In India, the Scheduled Castes (SC) is defined in the Indian constitution in Article 366(24) as "Tribes or parts of or groups within such castes, races or tribes as are deemed under article 341 to be Scheduled Castes". And, according to Article 341 of the constitution, the president, after conferring with the Governor, may choose which race, caste, tribe, or parts of castes or races should be classified as Scheduled Castes for the purposes of the constitution.

Scheduled Tribe (ST) is defined in Article 341 (25) as "Tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under article 342 to be Scheduled Tribes for the purposes of this Constitution". And with Article 342 providing that the president after consulting with the Governor may determine which race, caste, tribe or parts of groupings within such castes or races would fall under the category of Scheduled Castes for the purpose of the constitution.

SC/ST are disproportionately disadvantaged. SC/STs have a long history of being economically backwards, with the majority of them being extremely poor, entrenched in agriculture and other low-skill employment, and primarily living in rural areas. Furthermore, they have been subjected to centuries of economic and social oppression based on caste. Indeed, the historical heritage of social inequality through the caste system has resulted in class inequality along lines of education, occupation, and income in modern India. (Hnatkovska et al., 2012, Karade, 2008).

The ST make up around 8.2 percent of India's overall population. Rural areas account for 93.80% of the population, while urban areas account for 6.20 percent. The tribal population has had very distinct experiences than the scheduled caste group in the context of Hindu civilisation. While the tribal community has been socially alienated and secluded by Hindu society, the SC has been discriminated against and placed at the bottom of the social and cultural hierarchy by Hindus. (Mitra, 2008)

As the Hindu caste system is founded on the existence of a hierarchical social class, hurdles to admittance into privileged jobs, and concepts of purity and filial piety is based on one's social origin. Although Hindus have discriminated against the scheduled caste community, the ST has been absorbed into larger society and shares some common rituals and traditions with Hindus. Although upper caste Hindus do not consider the Avidas (schedule tribes) to be as "unclean" as the SC, they are socially isolated and marginalised. (Mitra, 2008).

The substantial discrepancy in status and income between SC and ST on the one hand, and high castes on the other, varies across India. Since independence, the government has used affirmative action to try to reduce these imbalances. Due to the lower caste individuals experiencing prejudice, injustice, and poverty the idea of giving lower-class people government jobs dates back to the early 1930s, when India was still under British administration. There was also agreement among the leaders of the freedom struggle on such a program, as evidenced in the "Poona Pact" of 1932. When India became an independent nation in the year 1947 and a sovereign republic, the same attitude and concern that existed in the 1930s was expressed in the formulation of the Constitution (1950). The Indian constitution's preamble guarantees social, economic, and political justice, as well as equality of position and opportunity for all citizens, including SC/ST (Jain et al., 1994, Madheswaran and Attewell, 2007).

In an attempt to abolish the caste system in India the Indian constitution included the following provisions.

Article 15 (1) states that,

“The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them.”

Article 16 (2) states that,

“No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, residence or any of them, be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect of, any employment or office under the State.”

Article 17 states that,

“Untouchability” is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of “Untouchability” shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law”

However, although caste-based discrimination is illegal in India, and caste-based predominance in employment has decreased, the distinction between the top and lower caste groups in terms of occupational structure and wellbeing remains. (Sengupta et.al, 2008).

## 1.5 Women’s Empowerment

Empowerment is a process through which the powerless gains control of the circumstances of their lives without having it being controlled by others. Empowerment especially includes the obtaining of control of ideologies and resources. Empowerment leads to increased self-assurance and a shift in consciousness, which aids in overcoming external obstacles. (Nayak, 2012).

Women's empowerment could be defined as a shift in a woman's life that allows her to have a greater capability for living a fulfilling human life. The term women’s empowerment also indicates that women should have the power or capacity to control their daily life in terms of social, political, and economic issues. They get higher self-esteem and confidence as a result of their contributions to their communities. When women have the ability to accomplish anything they desire, there is a greater level of equality between men and women. Considering that women’s empowerment can greatly aid in a nation’s development and progress while gender equality can help to prevent economic progress from being undermined. Women's empowerment is a broad notion that includes political, social, economic, legal, and cultural aspects. (Kaushal and Singh, 2016, Nayak, 2012).

Taking the position of women in India into consideration and their social status, they are not treated as equal to men in all the places as there is discrimination and gender disability (Hazarika, 2011). Although most Indian women make their living as agricultural labourers, the job options afforded by this sector, as well as enhanced labour market functioning, are projected to boost women's socioeconomic position. However, the surge in rural women's unemployment and underemployment is cause for concern. The quality of life of rural women has been harmed by the gender imbalances that exist in the Indian society (Kaushal and Singh, 2016)

The advent of MGNREGA, a programme that offers employment based on demand and is also designed to be gender sensitive, is seen to have the ability to remedy abnormalities in labour market functioning as well as gender-based discrimination (Kaushal and Singh, 2016). As MGNREGA has

claimed to empower women I would be using the concept of empowerment in analysing various states in which MGNREGA has been implemented to evaluate if the Act has genuinely empowered women.

## 1.6 History of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)

This section will present the background and evolution of the MGNREGA in order for us to completely comprehend what the Act is about, as it is the main topic of this thesis and is widely recognised as a turning point in India's anti-poverty efforts after independence.

The bulk of people in India live in villages with very poor socioeconomic conditions. There have been ongoing efforts to ameliorate the living circumstances of rural people since independence. In all subsequent five-year plans, rural development has been prioritised as an integrated idea of growth and poverty reduction. The Ministry of Rural Development has established a variety of plans and programmes with the primary goal of allowing rural people to enhance their quality of life. In the course of planned development, it has become clear that a long-term strategy for poverty reduction must be built on expanding productive employment possibilities as the economy grows (Kumar and Dipanwita, 2016).

Thus, during the Sixth Five-Year Plan (1980-1985), the major focus was on alleviating poverty through employment creation. The Ministry of Rural Development of the Government of India developed the National Rural Jobs Program (NREP) (1980) to achieve its aim of providing more productive employment in rural areas. However, because this program did not target a specific segment of the population, it was impossible to determine how much money was spent on the poor. Nonetheless, the initiative had a significant impact in terms of rural wage stabilisation, food grain price containment, and the establishment of a diverse range of community assets, all of which are projected to assist increase the rural population's standard of living (Kumar and Dipanwita, 2016).

The Ministry of Rural Development launched the Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Program (RLEGP) on August 15, 1983, as a supplement to the NREP. Similarly, the goal of this initiative was to enhance job opportunities in disadvantaged communities by giving people 100 days of guaranteed work, as well as to build long-term assets and infrastructure. Following that, the NREP and RLEGP were integrated into the Jawahar Rozgar Yojan (JRY) scheme for improved execution during the state's seventh five-year plan. The major goal of executing this program in all Indian villages was to expand job opportunities in productive activity that would either help the impoverished in the long run or contribute to the development of rural infrastructure. The JRY, on the other hand, failed because ten percent of the budget was diverted to contractors, there was no clarity about the poor's selection, and there was no clear data base that indicated the poor's requirements (Kumar and Dipanwita, 2016).

The Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS) was established on 2nd October 1993, with the purpose of identifying problems in areas susceptible to drought, desert regions, hills and tribal areas in which there was a revision and operation of the distribution system, with the principal objective of providing the rural poor within the age of 18-60, with 100 days of causal manual labour in agricultural activities. However, the system did not make much headway since it failed to achieve its principal goal of providing guaranteed employment because job distribution was based on predetermined criteria rather than personalized requirements, which led to additional difficulties that contributed to the EAS plan's demise (Kumar and Dipanwita, 2016).

In the meantime, while the previous employment structures (EAS,JRY) were being restructured the government recognized the need to engage in the development of the village infrastructure. On this basis the government of India established the Jawahar Gram Samaridhi Yojana (JGSY) which came into effect on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 1999 with the intent of developing more opportunity for the rural poor in attaining sustainable employment. The secondary objective of this scheme was to generate wage employment for the underprivileged individuals with no employment. However, the JSMY was the least understood by the targeted group and as other schemes failed in attaining its objectives. Thus, this scheme lasted for a very short period and was merged with a new scheme along with the JGSY named Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY) in September 2001, with the objective of providing additional wage employment and food security while creating sustainable community, social and economic assets and development of infrastructure (Kumar and Dipanwita, 2016).

However, this program failed due to the high wages provided in villages that were comparatively well off, which resulted in residents migrating. Furthermore, the plan collapsed owing to corruption in its implementation (Kumar and Dipanwita, 2016).

The national food for work program was established between January 2000 and January 2001 with the goal of resolving livelihood issues in 150 identified districts that were either dominated by schedule caste or tribe communities or were experiencing poverty as a result of agricultural issues or agricultural wage issues. The major goal of this initiative was to give additional resources in addition to benefits provided under the SGRY scheme (Kumar and Dipanwita, 2016).

With the election of a new administration led by the National Congress (INC) in 2005, the Employment Guarantee Act, also known as the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), was legislated with the intention of enhancing rural households' living conditions by providing 100 days of employment to the rural poor in 200 rural districts to every family whose adult members are willing to undertake unskilled physical labour. Water conservation and harvesting, land development, horticulture and plantations, and rural connection are just a few examples of permissible activities that are generally offered. Workers were paid piece rates for various jobs performed in various soil conditions, following to a schedule of rates provided by state governments. On April 1, 2007, it was expanded to 130 districts, and on April 1, 2008, it was expanded to all districts in India, giving it universal coverage. In 2009, the Act was renamed Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantees Act (MGNREGA) (Singh, 2017).

MGNREGA was created with the goal of socially integrating and empowering marginalised communities, as well as improving the livelihood and security of the impoverished through development, improving grassroot level democracy, and better accountability via social audits, and bringing together various anti-poverty schemes. MGNREGA further stipulated that men and women should be paid equally, that unemployment benefits should be provided, and that SC, ST, and women should receive 33 percent of the jobs available under the plan. MGNREGA also stated that the work sites will include childcare facilities, among other things (Sarkar and Islary, 2017).

Thus, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) was widely regarded as a watershed moment in Independent India's anti-poverty initiatives (Shah, et al., 2018).

This thesis continues with the second chapter laying the foundation to the research by discussing the, the struggle of SC/ST workers in the labour market, employment prospects of the SC/ST within the private sector, gender inequality in the Indian labour market and its dual impact on SC/ST women. The third chapter examines MGNREGA as a mode of employment guarantee, MGNREGA's impact on SC/ST, and MGNREGA's impact on women and women empowerment. The thesis's fourth chapter

provides case studies that back up the stated argument, and the final chapter concludes the research paper.

## Chapter 2 – Inequalities in the Indian Labour Market Based on Caste and Gender.

### 2.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter will be on inequalities in the labour market that have been caused by caste and gender. This chapter illustrates how caste and gender disparities have played a significant part in the issues that marginalised populations have faced in the labour market. Inequalities exist in every community in different ways, with the extent and severity of inequalities varying by society. These inequalities become worrisome only if they are not maintained to a minimum, since they lead to discrimination and marginalization, and have a detrimental impact on the livelihood, security and well-being of individuals and communities.

Prejudice in India has historically been based on gender and caste. While men and those who do not belong to lower caste communities benefit economically, women and those who belong to SC/ST communities (lower castes) do not benefit equally and endure severe disparities and discrimination. Discrimination also manifests itself in the way marginalized groups are treated in the labour market. As a result, they are significantly worse off in terms of income and a variety of other factors.

Marginality is a phenomenon that prevents people from having control over their own lives and assets, resulting in severe consequences of inequality for both them and society. As a result of such inequality both society and human growth are hampered.

This chapter provides material that examines the labour force participation of women, SC/ST, and derives an understanding that marginalisation and inequality goes hand in hand. It also explains how such inequalities and discrimination experienced by such communities in the labour market, negatively effects their security, livelihood, and welfare.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first half of the chapter goes on to outline the obstacles that the SC/ST face in the labour market. The second portion discusses the absence of job opportunities for SC/STs in the private sector. The third portion discusses the concerns of gender inequality in the Indian labour market, its impact on women, and its double impact on women from lower castes.

### 2.2 The Struggle of SC/ST Workers in the Labour Market

Discrimination in the labour market can take place in the areas of hiring, wages, working conditions, and occupational advancement, with upper caste individuals receiving preferential treatment and lower caste individuals being treated unequally and adversely in terms of working conditions and earnings, and occupation (Thorat and Newman, 2007).

Thus, in India, the caste system has historically been used to manage the country's economic activities, with the economy constructed on the division of the population into hierarchical social classes that govern members' economic entitlements, which are determined by birth and considered hereditary. Thus, caste-based economic privileges combined with stiff impediments to change result in forced exclusion (Thorat and Newman, 2007).

However, when compared to non-SC/STs, SC are marginally more likely to participate in the labour force. These effects are more pronounced among rural women than in other demographics, as the SC women do not face the same mobility restrictions faced by the upper caste women. Moreover, when also comparing SC males to non-Schedule Caste men, the SC men had a somewhat higher employment rate in the labour market. However, comparing SC and ST women's labour participation percentages, there is a larger percentage of ST women who participate under the Act (World Bank, 2011).

However, although SC are more likely to enter the labour force, for the most part, they did not own land and had always worked in the fields of the landed castes. Because agriculture is India's largest source of self-employment, SC who are landless are excluded from the big employment category of farm-based self-employment, and they are largely farm workers within casual labour (World Bank, 2011).

Moreover, SC are unable to build businesses because they lack the necessary funds and collateral to secure a loan. Even if they are given the opportunity to start such firms, they are unlikely to prosper because the SC community lacks financial resources and non-SC who are financially capable would not support them (Sardar & Ambedkar, 2012). Furthermore, because SC and ST individuals lack the same social ties as those from higher castes, they lack the essential social connections to establish a business and lack access to low-cost supplies, which has been detrimental to their lives (World Bank, 2011).

This is particularly pronounced in the rural regions. Being SC lowers one's chances of becoming an entrepreneur in urban regions, where the majority of nonfarm occupations and businesses are concentrated, with SC women being almost totally excluded from nonfarm occupations. Furthermore, because SC members are assigned to low-paying occupations in the labour market, salary disparities benefit non-SC, owing to occupational segregation. In contrast to other low caste groups, SC women chose to withdraw from the casual workforce when their educational attainment improved. However, because they do not have the option to work in the public sector because they were taken by SC men, they completely dropped out of the labour force. However, even if SC have completed a particular level of education, such as primary and secondary education, which in turn qualifies them to exit from casual labour, they are unlikely to be employed due to their social standing, and the number of employment available in rural regions has not expanded to accommodate SC men. However, it is suggested that, in comparison to SC males, ST men have a significantly greater chance because of the ST elites' confidence in the establishment of urban regions. Regardless of the foregoing, non-ST/SC men with the same degree of education have a better chance of finding formal work (World Bank, 2011).

While the SC community is the majority of those working in agriculture, they also have the highest participation rate in bonded labour, child labour, scavenging, and the removal of human waste in India. Furthermore, in certain instances women were compelled to become prostitutes. Furthermore, despite the difficulties that the SC population faces, they are paid less than the minimum wage or not at all. Additionally, the reservation policy in India which is a policy that reserves a specific percentage of employment to be provided to the lower caste, has not benefited the bulk of India's lower class, as the government system focuses primarily on the government sector, and it is defective, corrupt, and ineffective (Sardar & Ambedkar, 2012). Moreover, while there has been some progress in terms of proportionate representation under the reservation policy, the representation of SC/ST members remains significantly underrepresented (Jain and Ratnam, 1994).



### 2.3 Employment prospects of the SC/ST Within the Private Sector

Reservation in political representation and education has been a feature of Indian politics, and reservation in employment has been a part of it as well, with the goal of empowering the marginalised communities in the Indian society. Moreover, as the Hindu social structure does not acknowledge equality resulting in the marginalised communities facing disadvantages and restrictions, such reservation policies are necessary to achieve proportional representation as they distribute based on the proportion of the population, benefiting all and compensating for the injustice they have suffered (Mandal, 2009).

However, as a result of the state's adaptation to globalization, privatization, and liberalization, the state is abdicating its social responsibilities by handing over even high-profit public sector projects to the private sector, reducing public sector employment possibilities. This, in turn, has a negative influence on low-caste personnel of the government service or public-sector firms, such as SC/ST, as job reservations are no longer binding on new private owners of public sector firms, due to privatization. Furthermore, the privatization of the state sector makes it much more difficult for the SC population to get the 15% job quotas which has been promised under the reservation policy (Mandal, 2009).

Moreover, in July 1991 the Government of India adopted neoliberal economic reforms, a euphemism for the macro-economic stabilization and structural adjustment programs that was projected as globalization. There was thus tacit support for the core premise behind the caste system that inequality is natural. Obviously, it favored the elite who had innate grudge against the state for squandering resources over the 'undeserving' people in the name of social justice. Inequality in society was once considered systematic exploitation by accumulation models, but it is now related to people's diverse capabilities, skills, and competencies. Related to the effect of privatization, the government has become less responsible for meeting the needs of the community by allowing the price of basic amenities to increase, failing to invest in agricultural production, regardless of the fact that agriculture is the poor's primary source of income, and lowering the rate of employment in rural areas (Teltumbde, 2017). As a result, an Act like MGNREGA appeared to be fairly uncommon, as it overcame considerable opposition from those who wanted the state to play a limited role in the economic activities of the general public (Singh, 2017).

Along with employment, other key concerns in developing countries include the fall of female employees in the labour market, the types, poor earnings, as well as the working conditions (Mehta and Awasthi, 2019). Moreover, women are subjected to two types of prejudice: gender discrimination and caste discrimination (Singh & Pattanaik, 2020). This would be further discussed in the following sections.

## 2.4 Gender Inequality in the Indian Labour Market and Its Dual Impact on Schedule Caste and Tribe Women.

Despite the fact that Article 15 of the Indian Constitution and the directive State policy mandates gender equality that leads to the empowerment of women, India appears to have failed. Notwithstanding all the numerous ways in which Indian women are discriminated against, the labour sector is one location where there is particularly significant gender inequality, with women being denied equal opportunities and pay (Nandan and Mallick, n.d)

In India, the level of gender disparity varies by state and is based on each state's social traditions, economic, social, and political institutions, and women's collaborative efforts in achieving gender equality and constitutional principles (Nandan and Mallick, n.d)

Furthermore, according to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report released in 2018, India ranked 108th out of 149 countries indicating just minor progress. Furthermore, the little progress India has made in closing the gender gap appears to have benefited women in urban regions rather than the poor. From 2011–12 to 2017–18, the number of working women in rural areas decreased by 3.6 million, while the number of working women in cities climbed by 3.6 million. However, in both rural and urban areas, the overall rate of women participating in the labour force is continuously lower than that of men (Mehta and Awasthi, 2019).

Due to the links between gender and caste, SC women, who have a higher labour force participation rate than other castes, face severe limitations in their employment options. Furthermore, SC women are subjected to extremely exploitative working circumstances, sometimes to the point of being abused. In terms of wage equality, although the SC group as a whole is discriminated against despite having the same educational qualifications as everyone else, SC women experience additional discrimination just because they are women. Despite having a large participation in the labour market, women from the ST face the same double gender discrimination as SC women (Mosse, 2018, Mitra,2008)

<b>Female Labour Force Participation</b>	
Year	%
2010	25.965
2011	24.509
2012	23.099
2013	22.65
2014	22.208
2015	21.775
x2016	21.351
2017	20.934
2018	20.526
2019	21.179
2020	18.603

According to the above-mentioned World Bank figures, India's female labour force participation rate has been steadily declining. This clearly indicates that a significant number of women have taken up unpaid domestic work ( Singh and Pattanaik, 2019). For a country that has witnessed fast fertility transition as well as broad gains in women's education levels combined with substantial economic growth over the last two decades, this low rate of female labour market involvement in India is

perplexing. Rather than making it easier for women to enter the workforce, these changes have resulted in a persistently low proportion of women entering the labour force (Afridi et.al,2017).

Furthermore, in light of the continuing Covid19 pandemic affecting women in Indian labour market, Resham Suhail's report Women in Work: How India Fared In 2020, and the What Works to Advance Women and Girls in the Economy (IWWAGE) report it was stated that while the COVID 19 pandemic and ensuing lockdown affected individuals from all walks of life, the impact on women and girls in India was disproportionately severe. Around 71 percent of women in urban regions and 58 percent of women in rural areas did not have a documented work contract, and more than 50% of paid female workers in both rural and urban areas did not have access to paid leave or social security benefits. It was also shown that on average, women can only devote 5.8 hours per day to their home-based companies, which is disrupted by 6.6 hours of unpaid domestic, and caretaking duties.

Marriage has also long been seen to be one of the most important variables influencing women's labour market involvement. Women's marital status has influenced their labour force participation in two ways: first, once married, they automatically assume the role of homemaker, which makes it difficult to balance work and domestic responsibilities; second, marriage has a negative impact on a woman's social position and status, as she is assigned a lower ranking (Singh and Pattanaik, 2019).

Moreover, despite the safeguards India has put in place to address concerns of diversity, India continues to suffer deep and persistent diversity issues based on caste, religion, and gender, with incidences of severe violence against members of disadvantaged groups increasing rather than decreasing in recent years. India has become increasingly politicized and split by religious doctrine due to its failure to deal with historical and deeply established injustice, persecution, and violence based on these diverse characteristics (Haq et al., 2020).

## 2.5 Conclusion

As discussed in this chapter, discrimination based on caste and gender is the primary cause of wage disparities in the Indian labour market. India has a long history of religious and cultural discrimination, which has had a significant detrimental impact on the SC/ST and women in general as well as in the labour market. Thus, despite the fact that the constitution guarantees them equal rights, such effects have resulted in providing no benefit as there is no improvement in the lives of the SC/ST and women resulting in the continued marginalisation of them. As a result of their marginalisation, they have been denied of appropriate security and a decent living condition.

As a result, the government has failed to narrow caste and gender differences within communities, as well as to empower lower caste people and provide them with a better living, in order to eliminate inequalities.

Despite the fact that MGNREGA was implemented with the goal of eradicating poverty, this chapter examined some of the most evident flaws in the MGNREGA architecture which is issues with regards to providing the promised number of workdays, corruption, lack of empowerment, lack of awareness, lack of gender equality , and discrimination. Thus, although the Act was supposed to satisfy the scheme's aims of providing social security, livelihood, and empowerment by guaranteeing 100 days of employment on demand it failed to deliver. As Indian society has not yet transcended its caste and class mentalities, implementing the act with financial prudence and discipline at all levels, including the Panchayat level, is a lofty ambition. As a result, the act's fundamental goal of improving the lives of the poor and women has been hampered by cultural constraints, money, and power. Thus, MGNREGA appears to have failed to meet its objectives and adequately address the difficulties encountered by ST, SC, and women.

## Chapter 3- MGNREGA's Impact of SC/ST and women within the Labour Market.

### 3.1 Introduction

In addressing the issue of whether MGNREGA addresses the various concerns faced by the SC, ST and women in the labour market, India has taken up the initiative of implementing policies that aid in the eradication of poverty such as MGNREGA, as it was thought to be a critical step that has to be implemented (Bernstein, 2007, Barrientos and Hulame, 2008). Among the various goals of MGNREGA, the goal of empowering underprivileged populations such as SC, ST, and women and improving their security, livelihood, and societal position is one that this research study focuses on.

Although India has implemented MGNREGA with the goal of eradicating poverty, by improving people's livelihoods on a long-term basis through improving rural social and economic infrastructure and creating employment for marginalized populations such as women, SC and ST, this chapter explains how the MGNREGA's implementation has not always been a success in terms of assisting the poor (Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe and women) as the results differ from state to state.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section of this chapter talks about MGNREGA as a mode of employment and how it has not benefited the marginalized community, while the second section of the chapter goes on to state the impact MGNREGA has on the SC/ST. The third section talks about MGNREGA's impact on women and women empowerment.

### 3.2 MGNREGA as a Mode of Employment Guarantee.

Poverty is not a new problem in India, and the government's efforts to solve it with the introduction of five-year plans have failed to improve the economy by eliminating poverty. Although a gradual decrease in the number of individuals living below the poverty line (BPL) offers a positive picture, the depth of poverty has actually worsened (Chakraborty, 2014).

MGNREGA was implemented with the objective of paying fair wages, developing skills, and producing long-term assets to benefit programs participants, because the creation of such programs helps to provide employment, which is a critical factor in where unemployment and underemployment are widespread, resulting in a loss of livelihood and a decline in living standards (Devereux and Solomon, 2006). The following are the provisions of the Act that support the aforementioned:

Section 3 of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 specifies

1. That the legislation's goal is to improve the poor's livelihood and security in India's rural areas by giving a minimum of 100 days of yearly work to every impoverished family with adult members ready to undertake unskilled labour.
2. That such 100-day guaranteed employment shall be supplied in line with the law's requirements.
3. Within six months of the Act's passage, all state governments will create plans to carry out the legislation.

4. The government will set the pay rate for 100 days. If such a wage rate is not set for a certain location, they shall keep to the wage set forth in the Minimum Wages Act of 1948 until such a wage rate is established.
5. If a qualified candidate is not offered a job, the government is required to give him the non-award wage.
6. All states where the law is made applicable will be subjected to review, monitoring, and successful implementation of the legislation in their respective regions by a Central Employment Guarantee Council at the federal level and State Employment Guarantee Councils at the state level.
7. In each district, Gram Panchayats have been appointed to execute the Act.
8. For the purposes of this law, the federal government shall create a National Employment Guarantee Fund, and each state government will establish State Employment Guarantee Funds.
9. The statute also establishes expectations for accountability, audit, grievances, redressal processes, and penalties for non-compliance.

Thus, as a result, the justification for developing and implementing such programmes is founded on the assumption that the government plays a significant role in the growth of economies via improving the labour market. (Antonopoulos, 2009).

However, although MGNREGA has promised 100 days of guaranteed employment to all those who demand for work, as shown below, its universalism is illusory, as the stated 100-day job guarantee is not being followed in many states due to inability to obtain job cards, inability of demanding work from officials, or people's ignorance of their rights to do so. Furthermore, the promised job guarantee is ineffective because jobs are frequently awarded based on social position, nepotism, personal ties, religion, or corruption. It also implies that those who are refused employment are either uninformed of their right to work or that the instruments they have to enforce that right, such as the courts, are ineffectual (Fraser, 2015).

According to the (Ministry of Rural Development Government of India) the statistics with regards to average employment days per household as shown below is clear evidence of the promised 100 days employment not being delivered.

Average employment days					
District	2021-2022	2020-2021	2019-2020	2018-2019	2018-2017
Tamil Nadu	38.11	50.22	43.99	46.08	41.08
Bihar	33.76	44.65	42.03	42.19	36.35
Uttar Pradesh	32.69	41.82	46	42.05	37.35
Punjab	31.31	39.52	31.22	30.3	33.62
Rajasthan	44.15	61.06	58.95	56.97	53.11
West Bengal	38.33	51.98	49.89	77.03	59.63
Kerala	44.21	63.25	55.75	65.97	47.24
Jharkhand	39.58	46.35	46.36	42.17	41.03

Andhra Pradesh	47.73	54.35	49.59	58.32	53.09
Assam	26.75	36.33	32.31	30.58	28.54

Ministry of Rural Development Government of India (2021).

As the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act was enacted as a part of the National Common Minimum programme by guarantying marginalised communities an improvement of livelihood and security by providing them with an annual 100-day employment within a radius of five kilometres of ones residing village, with each state government developing an Employment Guarantee Programme that promotes the motive of the Act (Devereux and Solomon, 2006), the Act's intentions and goals were lofty, promising not just on-demand work but also livelihood stability, marginalised people's empowerment, and democracy's development (Agrawal, 2019).

As the goal of 100 days labour remains an unrealised ambition also due to implementation inefficiencies, the scheme's performance also changes greatly depending on the condition of each state (Dreze and Khera, 2009; Kumar, 2018). These disparities in MGNREGA participation aren't solely attributable to disparities between affluent and poor states. It has also been found that the MGNREGA performance in each state is influenced by the rationing procedure. This is where just a portion of those who requested labour were hired, rather than all of them. This rationing mechanism differed from one state to the next. The issue is assessed in the light of selected essential parameters in the face of a variety of perspectives on MGNREGA's success and failures (Dreze and Khera, 2009).

Furthermore, the gramme panchayats' capacity to deal with such large obligations has been impeded by a paucity of resources supplied to them. As a result, there has been inefficient management, low-quality assets, wage delays, and unfinished work. Despite these shortcomings, the Indian government decided to keep MGNREGA going by making changes to the implementation process. Despite these advances, in the years 2018-2019, it only managed to attain 50 days of average employment rather than the desired 100 days. As a result, the MNREGA continues to be dogged by inability to meet all its other promises and objectives. (Agrawal, 2019).

Furthermore, because MGNREGA failed to deliver the promised yearly 100-day employment, demand for work was not documented, and non-employment earnings were not paid, causing people to migrate in search of jobs. Moreover, in many instances the underperformance on MGNREGA has also been due to corruption. Taking the mandatory audit process in to account it has led to just being a mere statement made on paper and not put into action in an appropriate manner (Shah, 2016, Agrawal, 2019). Moreover, as the percentage of people who are classified as being poor is very high in India mainly among the schedule caste and schedule tribe and there has been a decline in the agricultural growth, people are being left with no choice but to become landless labourers by seeking informal employment as casual labourers. (Chakraborty, 2014).

Furthermore, the MGNREGA guidelines aim to encourage women to participate in the programme by taking into account the dual goals of eradicating poverty and hunger, as well as women's empowerment, as outlined in the Millennium Development Goals, which has now been replace by Sustainable Development Goals. As a result of the fact that one-third of the participants are women, the programme has been termed a gender-sensitive programme which promotes childcare facilities for women in the workplace and equal pay. Along with claiming to be gender sensitive, the legislation also pledges to empower women by not only giving them work, but also by providing them with

dignified employment, which has historically been hampered by women's lack of access to household assets and poor income. (Datta and Singh, 2012, Giribabu et.al, 2019).

The Act was also based on the belief that if women's earnings were greater, they would have an equal chance to express themselves and have equal control over their money as their male counterparts. However, there are significant differences across regions in terms of the aforementioned expectations and their actual fulfilment. As a result, the program's success in enhancing women's agency remains in question. (Datta and Singh, 2012).

### 3.3 MGNREGA's Impact on Schedule Castes, and Schedule Tribes

As MGNREGA has received the greatest attention compared to other employment generating programs, a significant number of studies have been conducted to examine its impact on improving the lives of the rural poor through increased work possibilities (Alha, 2017). According to research that compared Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, and other regions, Andhra Pradesh had the greatest income among impoverished households (Jha et.al, 2011). According to another survey, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Rajasthan had the highest female involvement rates (Khera & Nayak, 2009).

The initiative of MGNREGA by the government has put increasing pressure on rural agricultural and non-farm wages. Rajasthan has been recognized as the state with the most effective implementation of the program, particularly in its early years. (Alha, 2017). However, according to research conducted in several other states in connection to wage payment, the poor has had a difficult time getting paid on time, causing them to migrate in quest of work. As a result, despite the fact that one of the goals of MGNREGA was to develop rural areas by implementing projects under the scheme and providing employment under the scheme in order to prevent the rural poor from migrating in search of work, it has not been successful, due in part to the issue of wages not being paid accurately and in a timely manner. In certain instances, the delay in wages was by a month or more. One cause for the payment delays was the lack of banks in the affected areas. Due to the universalized use of bank transfers and post offices in several states, the absence of bank branches posed a payment difficulty. Furthermore, the quantity of currency that could be handled by post offices was limited. However, in certain cases, despite payments being completed, banks did not give passbooks, making it impossible to verify one's identification. Each state's payment history, however, differs from the others. Considering the problem of wage realization, the low average salary realization compared to the MGNREGA mandated wage rate also impacted workers' entitlements. The pay computation was based on the measures of the job performed that were defined in the Schedule of Rate (SoR), which was then generally applied, rather than considering the varied working circumstances in each state. Hence, the poor have suffered unfavorable consequences. (Saxena, 2015). Furthermore, when it came to program awareness, it appeared that in several states the members of the schedule caste and schedule tribe groups were unaware that persons are allowed to seek work and get employment allowance under the act. They were also unaware of the fact that they had to give a written request when demanding for jobs. In most instance they only made an oral request for jobs which were gone unregistered by the officials. The only thing they knew was that there was a chance for work under the Act, as well as the statutory pay rate. While being unaware of their right to demand they also complained about job cards not being issued to them in some instances. Though there was a lack of information about how to get a job under the plan, there were also a large number of unfulfilled demands that were not documented by the officials. Hence, despite the fact that the authorities failed to satisfy their demands for work by providing them with suitable job under the plan, the poor did not assert themselves because of their



fear and impotence. Consequently, the number of days of employment provided fell short of the 100 days promised by the plan. As a result, it has done little to improve the poor's livelihood or security (Saxena, 2015)

In addition to the difficulties outlined above, disadvantaged groups confront a number of other challenges, such as cancellation of job cards that has been developed as a new tool of marginalization and injustice. Officials have been utilizing this method to revoke job cards based on persons failing to show up for work. This was done without inquiring about their absence and giving them the opportunity to explain their absence. Issues with regards to wage realization and schedule rates has also been an issue as there has been no standard rate schedule under the MNAREGA since diverse sorts of activities are carried out by various departments. Furthermore, unlike MGNREGS, these SoRs (Schedule of Rate) were developed in the context of contract labour rather than unskilled wage labour (Saxena, 2015).

Furthermore, despite the MGNREGA's nondiscriminatory intentions, research suggest that discrimination under the plan is on the rise in numerous states, owing to factors such as higher caste leaders being elected. When this happens, the leaders choose which programs are most beneficial to their own caste, and they also tend to recruit others from their own caste. In some cases, higher authorities, in addition to leaders, favour workers from their own caste, syphon more money to villages where the leader belongs to the same political party as them. (Agrawal, 2019, Dutta, 2015, Johnson, 2009).

### 3.4 MGNREGA's impact on women and women empowerment

India's democracy centers around people's engagement in the political world, as evidenced by their adoption of democracy as their form of governance and a heavy emphasis on democratic values following independence. In order to accomplish so, the country's constitution laid the groundwork by establishing fundamental rights and demanding the well-being of all citizens through a set of rules. In order to ensure effective governance, India's legal and institutional structures are founded on its constitution (Bishnoi and Shukla, 2020).

After establishing a legal foundation for decentralisation, India's democracy has turned its attention to a more "Rights-based Approach" in policy debate, in order to empower individuals and establish a legal basis for their rights. The right to education (2002), the right to work (2005) (MGNREGA), the right to information (2005), and the right to food security (2013) (NFSA) all played a significant role in this context (Bishnoi and Shukla, 2020).

Although MGNREGA is seen as gender conscious and tries to generate jobs for women, the fact that work possibilities provide women with economic benefits does not always result in a change in their economic conditions. This section would further explain the aforementioned.

In order to integrate gender characteristics into the program, MGNREGA mandates that at least one third of the recipients must be women, there should be no wage discrimination between men and women, they should be compensated fairly, and, regardless of gender, panchayats who are local level bodies of governance at village, district, and intermediate levels, are required to give individuals the option of opening a personal or joint account. This rule was enacted with the intention of providing women greater financial power (Ministry of Rural Development, 2008, Kumar, 2021). Moreover, women should be represented in local committees, the social audit process, state and central-level

councils, and local Vigilance and Monitoring Committees, which check the progress and quality of work while it is being done. The Gram Sabha is in charge of choosing committee members as well as ensuring that women and SC/ST are represented. While women must be represented in social audit forums, the standards say unequivocally that a lack of participation by any of the essential groups should not be used as an excuse to avoid registering enquiries and complaints through the forum procedure (Ministry of Rural Development 2008).

Moreover, as rural women's empowerment is such an important component in building a successful nation and community because it ensures social stability (Rajalakshmi & Selvam, 2017)., it's important to remember that such empowerment must start from the bottom up. (Rajalakshmi & Selvam, 2017). The reason for this is because economic growth and women's empowerment go hand in hand since it allows women to readily access development components such as health, education, employment, rights, and political engagement. Furthermore, because ongoing discrimination against women may have a negative impact on a country's growth, such development may help to eliminate gender disparities. (Duflo, 2012).

Despite the fact that women account for more than two-thirds of MGNREGA workers in Kerala (71%) Rajasthan (69%) and Tamil Nadu (82%) and less than one-third in Assam (31%) Bihar (27%) W.B (17%), UP (15%), Himachal Pradesh (30%), and Jharkhand (27%), and two-thirds of female employees reporting to have encountered less hunger due to their employment under the MGNREGA, and as a consequence of MGNREGA, people may now find job in their own community, the act's success has been severely limited, with its full potential still being a long way from being achieved. (Mehta, 2019). Furthermore, despite the fact that women make up the majority of NREGA employees in places like Tamil Nadu and Kerala, this was not reflected in the plans put in place, as Women do not participate with greater assertiveness, nor are specific schemes aimed at them projected. MGNREGA was viewed as an opportunity for work and money generation by the women who took part in the study, rather than as a tool for empowerment and bettering their lives as women's rights to participate in the MGNREGA system, which is designed to provide them more financial control, have also been constrained. The treachery is that, despite the fact that their earnings are put in the bank, they create a bank account in the name of the male household member, defeating the goal. As a result, women's financial liberty is severely limited, as they must rely on males to withdraw funds. Furthermore, even when a woman opens a bank account in her own name, only a small percentage of women have a voice in how the funds are spent. As a result, women lose control over their finances and must still rely on males to withdraw their funds. (Mehta, 2019). Further limits on women's financial liberty include the fact that, in certain cases, they are not allowed to go to the post office or bank alone without a male companion since they are less educated and require the aid of a man to access their own account. As a result, women have not always been able to make decisions about their earnings. Consequently, the initiatives established did not benefit, empower, or enhance women's living situations (Mehta, 2019, Saxena, 2015, Chopra, 2019).

Despite the fact that the Act specifies that all households are entitled to 100 days of employment per year and equal earnings for men and women, the reality is that the actual number of employment days and wages granted do not reflect an equal image in terms of MGNREGA's gender elements. Furthermore, despite the fact that women are guaranteed 100 days of employment, labour appears to be classified on the basis of work that women are capable of performing against work that women are not capable of doing, owing to so-called physical constraints that society believes women have. Due to this cultural constraint, women are assigned to menial tasks such as shifting earth when wells are dug, which takes only a few days to complete. Furthermore, when couples work together, unmarried women have not been offered jobs. Women's desire for and participation in the MGNREGA

is hampered not just by cultural and institutional hurdles, but also by lifecycle vulnerabilities. There is a provision for physically challenged people to be assigned to various forms of employment, but there is no formal provision for pregnant women or women who have recently given birth to be assigned to various types of work. Women's career options have been limited as a result of the cultural constraints placed on them when it comes to working outside the home and alongside males, which has had a detrimental influence on the gender concept. As a result, the Panchayats have exacerbated this cultural barrier by enforcing the limitations put on women, making it even more difficult for them to find work as the Panchayats hinder them from doing so.(Holmes et.al, 2010).

Based on the findings, it is apparent that the MGNREGA's success has been severely hampered. Despite widespread agreement among policymakers that the scheme has benefited rural Indians, particularly women, it is reasonable to state that its success is limited to a large extent. As a result, while MGNREGA provides employment for women, it has failed to address the aforementioned issues, as well as delayed payments, illegal contractors, and household issues such as cooking, childcare, caring for the elderly and disease, and securing a convenient time and place, posing a barrier to the act's success (Datta and Singh, 2012, Mehta, 2019).

### 3.4 Conclusion

Despite the fact that MGNREGA was implemented with the goal of eradicating poverty, this chapter examined some of the most evident flaws in the MGNREGA architecture which is issues with regards to providing the promised number of workdays, corruption, lack of empowerment, lack of awareness, lack of gender equality , and discrimination. Thus, although the Act was supposed to satisfy the scheme's aims of providing social security, livelihood, and empowerment by guaranteeing 100 days of employment on demand it failed to deliver. As Indian society has not yet transcended its caste and class mentalities, implementing the act with financial prudence and discipline at all levels, including the Panchayat level, is a lofty ambition. As a result, the act's fundamental goal of improving the lives of the poor and women has been hampered by cultural constraints, money, and power. Thus, MGNREGA appears to have failed to meet its objectives and adequately address the difficulties encountered by ST, SC, and women.

## Chapter 4 Case Studies

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter expands on the previous chapter's discussion of MGNREGA as an Employment Guarantee Program, the impact of the MGNREGA on SC and ST, the influence of MGNREGA on rural women and women's empowerment.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore and analyse the importance of MGNREGA. The analysis will focus on the following elements of MGNREGA: equitable implementation, women's empowerment under MGNREGA, and awareness of MGNREGA across India's many states. This is done in order to explain how MGNREGA has the potential to empower and improve the livelihood of SC/STs and women if the plan is executed equitably, is gender sensitive, and raises awareness levels. This chapter also analyses how far these requirements have come in terms of implementation

In order to do so this chapter has selected the states of Rajasthan, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, and Jharkhand. In order to achieve the overarching purpose of this study, which is learning about the numerous obstacles that the SC, ST, and women populations face with regards to empowerment, as well as to assess how MGNREGA has handled these concerns this chapter uses a multiple case study approach.

MGNREGA has been applied in all the states and districts of India. This presents significant challenges for analysis, especially given the scope of this thesis. There is a vast number of issues with regards to the implementation of the Act, and all states have a unique combination of the issues, as we will see from the cases discussed in this chapter. As it's difficult to examine and analyse the value of high levels of awareness under MGNREGA, women's empowerment under MGNREGA, and MGNREGA's equal implementation across all states, I have chosen the following states as cases of convenience; they have the added benefit of spanning across the entire country geographically.

My case study methodology involves examining each of my selected states according to three criteria. These criteria are: the equitable implementation of MGNREGA, MGNREGA and Women's Empowerment, and the importance of the awareness of MGNREGA in terms of empowerment. Before moving on to my cases, I will explain in more detail what I mean by these terms and how I will use them to assess the cases.

#### 4.1.1 Equitable Implementation policy of MGNREGA

MGNREGA was adopted with the goal of achieving inclusive growth. This is a concept that combines growth, development, and equitable distribution to achieve a greater growth rate by reducing poverty, reducing income gap, and lowering unemployment rates. This also promotes equal opportunity during the growth process, with benefits accruing to all segments of society. Inclusiveness would indicate a more equitably distributed sharing of the benefits of increased growth (Kumar and Kumar, n.d).

The Act emphasises the principle of inclusive growth by stating that:

Section 1 A, “ The mandate of the MGNREGA is to provide at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work”

Section 2A (a), “ Providing not less than one hundred days of unskilled manual work as a guaranteed employment in a financial year to every household in rural areas as per demand, resulting in creation of productive assets of prescribed quality and durability”

Section 2A (c), “Proactively ensuring social inclusion”

Section 3A (i), “Social protection for the most vulnerable people living in rural India by guaranteeing wage employment opportunities”

Section 3A (iv), “Empowerment of the socially disadvantaged, especially, women, Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), through the processes of a rights-based legislation.”

However, the question is whether MGNREGA, although being adopted with features such as guaranteed 100-day employment, gender equality, and other provisions that encourage equitable growth, has been able to achieve its goal. This goal, to be clear, was clearly stated in the Act: “...to provide for the enhancement of livelihood security of the households in rural areas of the country by providing at least one hundred days of employment in every financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.” This will be further examined and explained in the case studies and analysis that follow.

#### 4.1.2 MNREGA and Women’s Empowerment.

One of the main aims of the MGNREGA is to empower women. Due to the obstacles, they confront in terms of wage discrimination, difficulty finding work, and other issues, the Act contains requirements to ensure women have equal and convenient access to employment, as well as fair pay and good working conditions.

Provisions in the Act include providing appropriate childcare facilities in workplaces, giving women priority in obtaining employment by declaring that one-third of all workers should be women, and equally compensating men and women were all designed with the goal of empowering women. There are other measures, which while not specifically aimed at women, are geared to assist them, such as work within a 5-kilometer radius of one's home and other flexible working arrangements. Although MGNREGA has such requirements, the following case studies examine how far such provisions have progressed in their implementation.

#### 4.1.3 The importance of the Awareness of MGNREGA in terms of empowerment.

Communication among people is an important part of a country's development strategy because it helps people understand their own interests via obtaining information they didn't already have through others or other means. It also plays an important role in raising public awareness by providing

information and expanding people's interests and understanding, as well as engaging and empowering recipients of various development programmes. It is also a vital interactive process in which development-relevant information, expertise, and skills are transferred between recipients and information providers. MGNREGA, which has the similar goal of increasing public awareness of the programme, has pushed towards educating people about it through the use of ICT and through their elected representatives. This would allow information to travel from one person to the next, increasing the number of people who participated in the programme, which would benefit the participants. (Parida et.al,2016).

Taking MGNREGA into account, a critical step in reaching high levels of awareness on the employees' rights and features of MGNREGA would be to enhance awareness among people in rural areas as well as other stakeholders, such as government officials and government agencies who are involved in the scheme's execution.(Parida et.al,2016, Sivasankari and Bharathi, 2012, Vikaspedia, n.d).

However, MGNREGA's success rate in promoting necessary levels of awareness among people has been low, owing to insufficient efforts to promote awareness about MGNREGA's procedures and laws, resulting in the people having a lack of understanding of their entitlements and obligations under MGNREGA (Shah, 2016). This aspect will be further analysed in the case studies below.

## 4.2 Rajasthan

### 4.2.1 *Has MGNREGA been equitably Implementation in Rajasthan?*

The MGNREGA which was implemented in Rajasthan in the year 2008 targeted the communities that belonged to the schedule tribes and Dalit communities as the main beneficiaries. At the initial stages the scheme seemed to be successful with a high percentage of schedule caste and schedule tribe members participating within the scheme (Saha, 2019, Swain and Sharma, 2015). However, after the dismantling of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government there were complaints with regards to corruption based on mishandling of finances, unwanted expenditures, no economic productivity, and caste issues that showed that the implementation of the scheme has not been successful (Saha, 2019)

In terms of the wage payment method of depositing the money to employees' bank accounts, despite the fact that the area had a significant number of banks and post offices for the payment of salaries, no wages were paid to the employees, and no unemployment compensation was provided to those who had registered under the system (Swain and Sharma, 2015).

Moreover, the caste discrimination within the state was not limited to the obvious discrimination between the Brahmins and the Shudras, but it extended to the extent of there being caste discrimination among the schedule caste, schedule tribes and other backward castes. As a result, this demonstrates how uneven social connections between upper castes and lower castes, along with a lack of knowledge and inadequate means of disseminating information to SC/ST groups, may become important factors for widely disparate NREGA participation rates (Saha, 2019).

Due to the aforementioned causes, while MGNREGA was effective in the early phases of its implementation process in Rajasthan, it did not retain its momentum throughout the process, resulting in MGNREGA not being implemented equally to benefit the poor.

#### *4.2.2 MGNREGA and Women Empowerment in Rajasthan*

The number of women employed under the scheme was quite high. In truth, they dominated the scheme. According to the statistics the percentage of women working in MGNREGA for the year 2020-2021 was 53.07%. Thus, being a female worker raised one's chance of participating in MGNREGA projects compared to being a male worker (Swain and Sharma, 2015, Sharma,2021).

MGNREGA has provided women in Rajasthan with the option to work and support their families without having to rely on their male family members financially. Furthermore, increased engagement by women in the plan has resulted in increased knowledge of the scheme among women (Swain and Sharma, 2015).

In the early years of MGNREGA, half of the monies were handed to the Panchayats for the scheme's implementation. However, owing to mishandling of funds, the mandate advocated direct deposit of monies into workers' bank accounts. This plan presented a fresh issue because many rural residents, particularly women and the elderly, were unaware of how to operate bank accounts. Most women and illiterate senior people cannot comprehend the entries in their bank accounts and work cards, according to public awareness sessions held in the most rural areas. This becomes a roadblock to appropriate implementation (Saha, 2019).

Despite the fact that a large number of women worked under MGNREGA and appeared to have financial independence from the men on whom they had previously relied on to meet their needs, the fact that the money that made them independent had to be withdrawn and given to them by men due to illiteracy and their inability to understand the procedure for cash withdrawal from banks appears to defeat the concept of empowerment and independence.

#### *4.2.3 MGNREGA's awareness level in Rajasthan*

Rajasthani's were very much aware of MGNREGA, which they referred to as MGNREGA or Job Card. MGNREGA was brought to their attention through Gram Panchayats, acquaintances, and their immediate surroundings (Sole, 2014, Dey, 2014). Moreover, the introduction of mass awareness campaigns based on the right to information also helped Rajasthan achieve high levels of awareness in contrast to other states (Menon, 2008).

### **4.3 Arunachal Pradesh**

#### *4.3.1 Has MGNREGA been equitably Implemented in Arunachal Pradesh?*

The overwhelming presence of a diverse cross-section of indigenous people in rural Arunachal Pradesh is a well-known reality. Galo, Adi, Nyishi, Apatani, Tagin, Monpa, Khampati, Wanchos, Sherdukpens, Singphos, Mishmis, and others are among the state's 20 major tribes, each having a number of sub-tribes (Koyu. et al., 2017).

The MGNREGA, which was implemented in the Northeast of India, offered legal 100-day employment to all adults living in rural households through the issuance of job cards, which was perfectly in line with the state's population structure, which include a large tribal population. During the years 2008 to 2014, the distribution of employment cards maintained at 93%. Furthermore, under the MGNREGA, a commitment was made to offer demand-based paid employment to families living below the poverty line. In light of this, an additional effort was undertaken to have a reflection of the demand for employment raised under the Act by job card-holding families. As a result, a substantial majority of job demands were met within the state (Koyu. et al., 2017).

Although the issuing of job cards to impoverished families will legitimate their wage employment and provide them with some level of family economic stability, the instance of Arunachal Pradesh revealed a declining pattern. Although the MGNREGA promised to provide 100 days of work per year to individuals living in poverty, it had failed to accomplish so in the state of Arunachal Pradesh (Koyu. et al., 2017).

During the whole period of 2008 to 2014, just 3.17 percent of families were found to have yearly obtained employment for 100 days, despite the fact that the total number of households holding a job card was 74.99 percent in Arunachal Pradesh (Koyu. et al., 2017).

According to the Ministry of Rural Development of India the number of workdays provided for each household were as follows:

Year	Person days
2017-2018	30.2
2018-2019	42.95
2019-2020	48.63
2020-2021	56.75
2021-2022	41.41

Considering all the bad experiences in Arunachal Pradesh with relation to the MGNREGA's unsuccessful implementation, it is evident that the implementation authority should be held accountable for their lack of responsiveness to the poor and failure to supervise the scheme's implementation. It has plainly failed to meet its promise of providing disadvantaged people with 100 days of work. To make MGNREGA really useful, the implementing authorities must further educate impoverished work card-holding families in voicing their demands for employment under the scheme. (Koyu. et al., 2017)

#### 4.3.2 MGNREGA and Women's Empowerment in Arunachal Pradesh

In the research done by Koyu and colleagues it was provided that in the rural sections of the state, there was a female-to-male ratio of 938:1000. With this gender aspect in mind, an attempt was made to see how much balance could be maintained while offering employment to the women's cross-section of the state's rural agrarian nexus through MGNREGA (Koyu et al, 2017).



The following table shows that women folk accounted for 36.36 percent of total person days created across the various constituent years, demonstrating that there was still a lack of balance for that social category, particularly in terms of the state's current female-male ratio (Koyu et al, 2017).

Years	Female involvement out of the Total Person days
2008-09	62.49%
2009-10	18.22%
2010-11	37.73%
2011-12	28.42%
2012-13	32.92%
2013-14	33.31%

#### 4.3.3 MGNREGA's awareness level in Arunachal Pradesh

People in Arunachal Pradesh are unaware of their basic entitlements under the scheme, such as their right to obtain a job card, their right to minimum wages, their right to unemployment allowance, their rights to compensation, fare wages, and decent working conditions, without which they cannot reap the benefits of the scheme (Lali, 2021).

Furthermore, despite a lack of public awareness that has contributed to the scheme's failure by reducing the number of people working and benefiting from it, which defeats the scheme's purpose, there is also a lack of understanding of such entitlements among Panchayats, which has contributed to MGNREGA's poor performance (Lali, 2021).

## 4.4 ASSAM

#### 4.4.1 Has MGNREGA been equitably Implementation in Assam?

In terms of MGNREGA implementation in Assam, it has been implemented in 32 districts, with a greater percentage of employees employed by the plan compared to other states. Despite the fact that Assam employs a high number of unskilled and illiterate workers, it faces difficulty in implementing the MGNREGA (Baruah,2017, Gogoi and Hussain, 2021).

Factors such as a lack of worksite facilities in accordance with the program's criteria and a defective implementation process are to blame for the state's underemployment of job card users. Furthermore, because to the Covid19 lockdown, personnel were unable to work, resulting in a decrease in the number of persons participating in the programme. The most serious issue that arises in the successful execution of MGNREGA in the state is the lack of proper verification at the time of approving job cards and allocating employment resulting in and potential beneficiaries being denied the opportunity to obtain work cards. Furthermore, Assam is dealing with a problem of late wage payments, which has discouraged workers from working under the scheme. This has primarily been observed among single women employees who are the sole breadwinners in their households (Gogoi and Hussain, 2021).

Thus, due to the defective implementation procedure, inaccurate wage payment technique, and anomaly in job card sanctioning, despite the fact that Assam has a big percentage of people working under MGNREGA, it has not entirely succeeded in ensuring appropriate employment opportunities for the beneficiaries (Gogoi and Hussain, 2021).

#### *4.4.2 MGNREGA and Women Empowerment in Assam.*

MGNREGA is a big step forwards in the economic empowerment of rural women. Taking Assam into account, employment under MGNREGA and earning a wage has considerably aided women in developing their knowledge and making a big difference and influence in their family status as they have become more financially independent and have gained the ability to make their own decisions. As a result, women in Assam have been able to defy the patriarchal notion that women should stay at home and rely on men financially. (Bhattacharyya, 2016, De and Bhattacharyya, 2013).

However, in contrast to the aforementioned benefits, MGNREGA has failed to offer suitable childcare facilities, which would make women's occupations easier in Assam. Although MGNREGA paragraph 26, 28, 29, in schedule ii of MGNREGA states that if there are five or more children accompanying the women and they are under the age of six, one woman should be appointed to care for the children and that woman should be paid at the same wage rate as the rest, and there should be adequate shade and other facilities for the children, it appears that no such facilities are provided in the worksites in Assam. Women with minor children are unwilling to take their children to work because of the lack of these amenities. (De and Bhattacharyya, 2013).

Adequate childcare facilities can have a direct impact on women's empowerment and the MGNREGA's potential, since it will increase the number of mothers who participate in the system, giving more women the opportunity to be independent of males De and Bhattacharyya, 2013).

#### *4.4.3 MGNREGA's awareness level in Assam*

Despite the fact that the beneficiaries were aware of the salary rate and job cards, the beneficiary's degree of understanding of various benefits and entitlements under the Act's provisions in Assam is deemed unsatisfactory. The beneficiaries' poor knowledge level in terms of entitlements that they were ignorant of include unemployment benefits and a travel allowance, ombudsman, methods of obtaining job cards, minimum wage rate, social audit study, procedures in completing a form to obtain a job card, and the right to information, thus resulting in poor employment outcomes due to the beneficiaries being unaware of the procedures and objectives of the scheme (Baruah, Goswami, 2014, Bhattacharyya, 2016).

## 4.5 West Bengal

### *4.5.1 Has MGNREGA been Equitably Implementation in West Bengal?*

Despite, the fact that the legislation guarantees 100 days of employment, the average day of employment supplied to West Bengal families in the fiscal years 2014-2015, 2013-2014, and 2012-2013 was 33.15, 37.44, and 34.7. During the previous three years, West Bengal's government has been able to provide 100 days of employment to 1,58,290, 2,80,627, and 2,53,088 families. As a result, there are evident discrepancies between job card holders, active job card holders, and the number of days worked (Mukherjee,2018).

The need for registration and employment is considerably less in highly urbanised districts and regions of such districts that fall under the jurisdiction of the Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority. According to the MGNREGA, a programme may be implemented at the GP level if there is a demand for employment for at least 10 registered people. The accomplishments of the districts of Malda, Murshidabad, Birbhum, and North 24 Parganas are greater in this regard than those of the other 13 districts where demand for work grew compared with the previous year. In terms of programme implementation, West Bengal's performance is unsatisfactory (Mukherjee,2018).

MGNREGA's performance has also been hampered by issues like as non-payment of wages and a lack of job prospects. Taking the districts of Burdhaman and Purulia in West Bengal majority of individuals in claimed that MGNREGA has not produced job opportunities, with only 37 percent and 23 percent stating that MGNREGA has created job opportunities, respectively (Sengupta and Hazra,2018).

### *4.5.2 MGNREGA and Women Empowerment in West Bengal.*

Even though the MNREGA enables rural women to find work and earn an income, it has been discovered that in some districts of West Bengal, participants are paid less than the statutory rate for unskilled labour. Furthermore, according to a poll, the majority of the scheme's members are from low-income and marginal communities, with less participation from the higher castes. As in a community separated by castes and faiths, women's mobility is regulated by distinct rules. Muslim women have encountered comparable constraints to those faced by higher caste women in participating in the MGNREGA system. Although Muslim women in West Bengal are allowed to work in the family business , they are forbidden from working with people who are not related to them (Mukherjee,2018).

In terms of wage control, a large proportion of women collect their pay without the assistance of a man. Despite this, women have little influence over their wages since they provide the income to the male in the household, reducing their negotiating power which leads to a fall in empowerment. However, unlike the SC women in the plan, the fraction of upper caste and Muslim women who did gain the option to seek job under the scheme were able to retain their earnings to themselves and spend them as they pleased. (Mukherjee,2018).

Women are positioned into households, which are located within the macro environment. The bargaining axis inside the family will be tilted towards women if measures such as equal pay for men and women, equal rights to paternal assets, reservation for women in different public organizations, and making the macro environment more favorable to women are adopted. A woman's dignity is influenced in part by society's perception of women, which is the most difficult to change (Mukherjee,2018).

#### *4.5.3 MGNREGA's awareness level in West Bengal*

The beneficiaries in West Bengal have a low level of MGNREGA awareness, as they are uninformed of their rights, such as the right to work under the plan, the wage rate, the number of days they are entitled to demand for work annually, and who is responsible for paying their payments (Das, 2019, Das and Mahanto,2012).

Another notable issue is that villagers are unaware that MGNREGS is a demand-driven programme, indicating that applicants should be able to find work within 15 days of applying. Respondents stated that the panchayats inform them when work under the scheme is available, and that anyone with a job card who wants to work is given work. This is a departure from the program's fundamental purpose, which is to provide financial stability during the lean employment season. Many of the responders said they quit their day jobs as agricultural labourers to participate in the programme. During the lean period, however, they are unable to work as an agricultural labourer or in MGNREGS because panchayats declare absence of employment, which is contrary to the scheme's criteria (Das and Mahanto, 2012).

This raises an essential question: do the panchayats want the general public to know about the programme? Another factor contributing to the lack of knowledge in West Bengal was the dearth of public awareness initiatives. Furthermore, while the people have access to the MGNREGA rules, the problem is that they are unable to comprehend them due to illiteracy (Das and Mahanto, 2012).

## **4.6 Andhra Pradesh**

### *4.6.1 Has MGNREGA been Equitably Implementation in Andhra Pradesh?*

Within the rural Andhra Pradesh politics is dominated by the Reddys and the Kammas who are the rival land owing casts (Benbabaali, 2018). Despite the caste base rivalry, the MGNREGA has benefited rural Andhra Pradesh. The scheme benefited 55 lakhs households and the scheme had provided 2731.98 working days. Moreover, the participation of individuals that belonged to Schedule Casts and Schedule Tribes were relatively high with the percentages being 23.97% and 15.38% respectively. The level of female participation was also unexpectedly high with a total of 187,575 completed works. (Komal, 2014)

One reason for the why the MGNREGA has succeeded in Andhra Pradesh is genuine commitment demonstrated by the political class. The late chief Minister, Y.S. Rajashekar (YSR), made it very clear

to all that during his tenure the scheme should not be misused, to finance political interests, and to accumulate wealth. He was also very clear that anyone who commits any violations should not be protected (Maiorano, 2014).

Another reason for the successful implementation of MGNREGA is that the implementation process has been completely taken out of the hands of panchayats (Village Council) and is controlled by the state as being under the control of panchayats leads to corruption (Khosla, 2011).

#### *4.6.2 MGNREGA and Women Empowerment in Andhra Pradesh*

In order to address the issues that mostly affect women in Andhra Pradesh, the duty of recruiting women employees, as well as providing counselling services, should be committed to the female members of GP (Salian and Leelavathi, 2014).

Moreover, in order to empower women and give them a better livelihood Salian and colleagues, (2014) states and recommends that, although women's participation is fairly high in terms of percentage, given the high prevalence of unemployment among rural females in Andhra Pradesh, the number of days of employment for households, particularly women, must be increased. In addition, the current ratio of female participants in the system should be increased by IEC activities being carried out to promote the plan and raise awareness among rural families and the broader public about the scheme's aims and fundamental entitlements, as per the Act and operational instructions of the Government of India. To guarantee a sufficient worker participation rate under MGNREGA, realistic prediction of labour demand through household surveys of job card holders, as well as appropriate planning and execution of works, is critical. Work on the land of marginalized communities, should be prioritised, and particular measures should be taken to offer these homes with 100 days of employment. To avoid wasting money, the efficiency and stability of the job should be prioritised. As a result, it is critical to construct a strong quality management system by engaging independent quality monitors to assure the quality of durable assets generated under MGNREGA. Moreover, the ability to achieve the goal of creating long-term assets and strengthening the economic resource base of the rural population more effectively by combining MGNREGA with other projects and schemes. The initiatives will allow for better planned and coordinated governmental investments in rural regions, as well as greater job prospects. Amenities such as childcare facilities, fresh water, and shelter should indeed be available at the worksite to encourage more women to participate in MGNREGA. As poor, widowed, and deserted women qualify as a family under the MGNREGA they should also be provided with job cards and the promised 100 days of labour. Conduct assessment activities to develop gender-sensitive Schedules of Rates and to guarantee that the labour done by women at work locations is accurately recorded (Salian and Leelavathi, 2014).

#### *4.6.3 MGNREGA's awareness level in Andhra Pradesh*

The situation is ambiguous when it comes to entitlement information in Andhra Pradesh. On one hand, Andhra Pradesh in general has the greatest degree of awareness in India with regards to the rights employees are entitled under MGNREGA, and in certain circumstances job seekers are able to find work despite lobbying efforts by large farmers, whose interests are aligned with minimising MGNREGA activity in their areas. Workers may still be excluded, but their capacity to demand paid labour in

MGNREGA is contingent on their knowledge of the programme, which is mostly dependent on Field Assistants. However, this is not the case among the tribal community in Andhra Pradesh. Not only is there a dearth of understanding of entitlements in these places, but wage earners are sometimes led to believe that MGNREGA is a service provided by contractors rather than a legal right (Masiero & Maiorano, 2018).

Furthermore, despite the high level of knowledge in Andhra Pradesh, there are still flaws with how payments are calculated, which has resulted in employees being unable to claim the proper amount owing to them. Because wage seekers are not provided specific estimates, they are unclear of the extent to which the procedure may be fair, this makes the occurrence of partial payments difficult to quantify (Masiero & Maiorano, 2018).

## 4.7 Tamil Nadu

### *4.7.1 Has MGNREGA been Equitably Implementation in Tamil Nadu?*

Although the state has improved its welfare measures and has been successful in the implementation of MNREGA in Tamil Nadu, there are issues with regards to the schedule caste not profiting from the welfare measures, since crimes against them continue to rise. Even if the MGNREGA system is in place, the SC experience horrors such as being denied job based on caste, and even if they do acquire work, they are exposed to discrimination and harassment at work. To compound the problem, it has been discovered that the labour allotted under MNREGA has been separated, with the non-SC not working with the SC. When the Gram Panchayat agrees to carry out a land improvement project under the MGNREGA but excludes land that belongs to the ST/SC, this is an example of social injustice under the plan. Furthermore, owing to prejudice, the SC/ST would be unable to use the water pumps, irrigation system, or village services. Villagers have yet to accept women and lower castes as leaders. The Dalits are never allowed to participate in the operation of the villages because of the dominant cast. (Ranjithumar, 2018).

However, it was found that the establishment of MGNREGA in Tamil Nadu, the rural poor's migration in search of work decreased, while agricultural incomes increased. Furthermore, it was shown that once the MGNREGA was implemented, women were given more negotiating leverage in terms of salary rate the government (Agrawal, 2019).

### *4.7.2 MNREGA and Women Empowerment in Tamil Nadu.*

Tamil Nadu has one of the highest rates of women beneficiaries under the MGNREGA. However, despite the favourable outcomes for women such as the ability to financially support their family, women's empowerment through MNREGA has been limited by women's challenges. Inadequate childcare facilities make it difficult for women in Tamil Nadu to bring their children to work. Furthermore, while the Act says that employees who reside more than 5 kilometres from the worksite should be granted transportation, this has not been the case in Tamil Nadu, making it difficult for women, particularly elderly women, and women with children, to get to work. Furthermore, women are paid less than men for the same job, resulting in gender imbalance and women opting out of

MGNREGA-related jobs in favour of higher-paying jobs outside the programme when they get the opportunity. Women have also been vulnerable to a variety of mental and physical concerns as a result of the absence of work amenities in workplaces for women. Despite the fact that the Act has provisions to assist women's empowerment, the MGNREGA implementation process in Tamil Nadu has not been able to fully comply with the Act (Carswell and De Neve, 2014, Xavier and Mari, 2014, Natesan and Marathe, 2021).

#### *4.7.3 MNREGA's awareness level in Tamil Nadu*

Tamil Nadu's rural populace has a high level of social knowledge about MGNREGA and collective action, which helps individuals file claims with the government. This social consciousness has developed over time as a result of a long history of political, social, and caste-based activities that have enabled rural people as a whole to mobilise for their own interests and express claims against the state. (Carswell and De Neve, 2014).

## 4.8 Jharkhand

### *4.8.1 Has MNREGA been equitably Implementation in Jharkhand?*

Although MNREGA's goal is to improve the lives of the poor, Jharkhand still faces substantial challenges with regards to its implementation such as, The Inability to define a Household

Although the Act defines a 'household' as "the members of a family related to each other by blood, marriage or adoption and normally residing together and sharing meals or holding a common ration card", the definition varies at the time of implementation, as it states that a 'household is defined as "a nuclear family comprising of mother, father, and their children, and may include any person wholly or substantially dependent on the head of the family. Households will also mean a single member family" (Kumar et.al, 2018). As a result of this misinterpretation, the Gram Panchayat considers a joint family to be a joint family and issues them only one work card. This makes it tough because they must share one card even among family members who are simply living in the same house and is dependent on the head of the family but are not biologically related to them. Another concern that employees have with job cards is that the Panchayat does not follow the established norms and regulations while providing them, resulting in inconsistencies such as job cards not being delivered on time. As a result, there had a detrimental impact on job opportunities. There was also a lack of understanding of their entitlement to file complaints (Kumar et.al, 2018).

- Issues with regards to registration

In order to optimise enrolment, a door-to-door survey must be conducted to find people willing to work under the system. However, no such survey was done, which contributed to the scheme's poor execution (Kumar et.al, 2018).

- Issues with regards to the issuing of job cards.

There were cases that showed the panchayats did not follow the required norms regarding job cards, and that job cards were not provided on schedule, resulting in negative employment outcomes (Kumar et.al, 2018).

- Employment Guarantee Day is not observed.

Although the MNREGA stipulates that an Employment Guarantee Day (Rozgar Diwas) be held once a month for employees to create awareness of the MNREGA system and to address their concerns regarding their employment, this was never done (Kumar et.al, 2018).

- Inadequate and unsatisfactory work quality

All work locations should include drinking water, suitable resting facilities, and a first aid kit to address minor accidents and other health concerns, according to the MNREGA. Unfortunately, despite funding being authorised, no such amenities were supplied at work sites owing to anomalies and corruption (Kumar et.al, 2018).

- Issues with Regards to wages and un-employment

In terms of wage payment, even though the Act specifies how wages must be paid to all MNREGA employees who have been granted employment as well as those who have not, MNREGA employees in Jharkhand did not appear to receive their payments on time, and in some cases experienced payment delays of up to a month, and no one was paid the non-employment allowance. Another cause for non-employment pays not being paid is a lack of understanding of the application process for claiming such benefits (Kumar et.al, 2018).

- Illiteracy and Communication Gap

Illiteracy of the villages is one of the main causes for the MGNREGA's inefficient implementation. The implemented programme shall be shown in the native language of each state, according to MNREGA rules, illiteracy functions as a considerable obstacle to the local populations' unawareness. This leads to the inability to read and understand the implemented programme (Kumar et.al, 2018)

- Venality and Corruption

Despite the fact that the Gram Sabha is responsible for designing, overseeing, and executing the programme, the Gram Sabha's lack of enthusiasm in doing so has resulted in corruption at the system's core, badly impacting work quality and causing delays in payments (Kumar et.al, 2018).

#### *4.8.2 MNREGA and Women Empowerment in Jharkhand.*

Discrimination based on gender is a problem in Jharkhand. Although MNREGA supports gender equality by offering equal job opportunities and remuneration for men and women, this does not appear to be the case in practise, since discrimination still exists at the point of implementation (Kumar et.al, 2018).

Workplaces have also failed to provide suitable childcare facilities in accordance with MGNREGA's operational requirements, which undermines women's empowerment (Kumar et.al, 2018).



#### *4.8.3 MNREGA's awareness level in Jharkhand.*

In terms of raising awareness, the Act mandates that a monthly Employment Guarantee Day be organised to discuss issues such as work, complaints, ideas, and concerns. It has been authorized to be a focused group conversation in which people from the concerned Panchayat gather to plan development projects for their community and discuss potential job prospects. This conversation is expected to include village representatives as well as MGNREGA-affiliated government officials. Furthermore, the MGNREGA operational standards state that a specific day of the week must be designated for processing job applications and carrying out related actions such as disclosing work orders, assigning work, paying wages, and paying unemployment benefits (Kumar et. al, 2018).

However, it was determined that employment guarantee day was never followed, in violation of the requirements. Even elected village leaders, who were directly engaged with MGNREGA, were unaware of this day, which was both astonishing and sad. If the employment guarantee day had been held, villagers would have had the opportunity to contact with government officials and express their concerns with MGNREGA officials. This emptiness has resulted in an institutional chasm as well as a wedge between the villages and the MGNREGA beneficiaries.

Moreover, although the Ministry of Rural Development of India believes that raising awareness is critical to implementing MNREGA, the villages, however, were uninformed of the MGNREGA plan's procedural formalities, mode of operation, and operating instructions, despite the fact that they were aware of the scheme. This resulted in the employees not being able to reap the full benefits of MGNREGA. For example, there were several persons in the region who were qualified for unemployment benefits but were unable to claim them due to a lack of knowledge about how to apply for them. (Kumar et.al, 2018).

## **4.9 Kerala**

### *4.9.1 Has MNREGA been equitably Implementation in Kerala?*

According to the survey done by Abymon and colleagues NREGA has been critical to the rural population's economic growth in Kerala, as for many rural households in Kerala, NREGA is one of the most significant sources of employment. It has been proven to be advantageous in areas such as savings development and debt repayment. This has also been experienced by individuals whose only source of income is through MGNREGA. Individuals whose main source of income is from MGNREGA work have been able to pay off their debts to some extent, and because MGNREGA salaries are sent straight into the employees' bank accounts, they have been regarded savings that may be used for their basic needs. (Abymon et.al, 2018).

In terms of execution, it was determined that the panchayats had carried out the plan effectively since the employees were well aware of their allowances and advantages under the system. Furthermore, it was discovered that the challenges that the employees experience are dealt with promptly and efficiently. (Abymon et.al, 2018).

Although the MNREGA appears to be succeeding in Kerala, the study discovered difficulties that needed to be addressed in order to improve its effectiveness. The research found that not all

employees received the guaranteed 100 days of work, the workplaces lacked childcare facilities, and that there was insufficient training provided so that employees could earn higher earnings. Thus, to strengthen MNREGA implementation in Kerala, panchayats should provide childcare facilities to make women's job much easier, as well as training for employees to enable them to learn new skills and earn more. (Abymon et.al, 2018).

#### *4.9.2 MNREGA and Women Empowerment in Kerala*

MGNREGA has provided women in Kerala with a significant measure of financial stability. Women recipients reported that the money they received was enough to cover their daily expenses. Women have also benefited from the plan in terms of economic, political, personal, family, and social empowerment (Alexson, 2020).

MGNREGA in Kerala has aided women in their social disparities by allowing them to report to work notwithstanding their community and caste distinctions. The MGNREGA's method of directly depositing wages into bank accounts has been a success in Kerala since women have demonstrated financial independence in terms of their earnings and have had the freedom to spend their earnings on household expenses and their children rather than on their men, making them less reliant on men (Alexson, 2020).

#### *4.9.3 MNREGA's awareness level in Kerala*

In comparison to other states, Kerala NREGS workers have a comparatively high degree of awareness. Kerala's local governance system, with its institutionalised processes, plays an important role in informing the public about government plans and development projects. Most importantly, by enlisting its members in the activities, Kerala's powerful Kudumbshree (local Organization of Neighbourhood organizations) network contributes significantly to raising awareness and implementing NREGS (Varkey, 2010).

Furthermore, a high level of employees are aware of their rights, such as the right to 100 days of annual on-demand employment, unemployment benefits, the right to obtain work 15 days after making a job demand, and the right to sufficient worksite amenities (Varkey, 2010).

## Chapter 5 - Concluding Analysis

This study has found that there should be reforms with regards to the implementation of MGNREGA in order to empower SC/ST and women who are considered the marginalized communities in India. It is evident that MGNREGA has many provisions that have been enacted with the intent of providing a better life for SC/ST and women. However, the accomplishment of the Act has been met in varying degrees in each state due to implementation flaws, corruption, and discrimination. Thus, although in certain instances the MGNREGA has benefitted the disadvantaged populations, the Act continues to have devastating implications to many as it has not been able to achieve its full potential due to reasons such as late payment, discrimination, lack of work facilities, payment issues, among others. The Act has also failed in achieving sustainable development goals, which are to end poverty and hunger, ensure good health and wellbeing, ensuring good education for all, achieving gender equality, foster long-term economic growth and ensuring that everyone has access to productive and dignified work.

Taking Rajasthan into consideration although it has a high level of female employees working under the scheme which has led to their empowerment and increased awareness among the women, MNREGA has failed due to corruption, mishandling of finances, unwanted expenditures, no economic productivity, caste issues, illiteracy, and issues with regards to wage payments. MNREGA in Arunachal Pradesh has also been a failure due to no economic stability, less than 100 days employment provided, and having less women participating in the scheme. MNREGA has also failed due to the lack of awareness just as Assam. MNREGA has failed in Assam due to lack of awareness about the scheme, lack of understanding of their rights under the Act, and a failure to adequately conduct the monitoring procedure, lack of worksite facilities, issues with regards to obtaining job cards, late wage payments. West Bengal has also shown how implementation flaws of MNREGA, caste issues, and lack of awareness of the Act has hampered the implementation of MNREGA and it has also shown how women are not financially independent. Andhra Pradesh also shows how there is lack of awareness, wage payment issues along with lack of women empowerment. Jharkhand has also shown many institutional and non-institutional challenges faced by MNREGA which has led to the failure of MNREGA. Additionally, although MGNREGA is somewhat successful, and maintains a high awareness level of the Act in Tamil Nadu the state faces issues such as discrimination of the SC/ST peoples lack of childcare facilities in work sights and lack of training in terms of employment. However, taking the state of Kerala into consideration it seems to be the most successful in comparison to all the other states in this study. Kerala has demonstrated that, despite shortcomings in the implementation process, the act is more equally administered than in other states, and the panchayats have more political will to see the Act succeed and empower neglected populations. It also demonstrates high levels of knowledge as a result of institutionalised processes, which play a major role in raising awareness of the scheme, which is not found in other states.

Hence, in terms of empowering the SC/ST and women through alleviating poverty, gender equality, developing a peaceful, achieving an inclusive society for everyone, and safeguarding the well-being of ST/SC and women, MGNREGA has although not completely failed it has failed to an alarming extent. Furthermore, MGNREGA failed to achieve sustained economic growth and supply all equally with productive and decent job, as well as to give adequate education to all, since illiteracy rates among women are high in several areas, leaving women powerless and reliant on males.

As there are significant variances and parallels in the difficulties that the aforementioned states confront due to the varying levels of success of each state's implementation procedures, it's possible to conclude that the cause of such disparities in execution is a combination of a lack of political will and a lack of administrative commitment. Although the MGNREGA does not appear to be having a beneficial impact in all states, it has the potential to make a significant difference in people's lives if there is political will and if the implementation process is improved. Only if there is greater political will and a higher level of dedication on the part of government officials to take leadership of MGNREGA and be willing to adapt and alter the process will the scheme improve, resulting in greater benefits to the poor and the system's success.

Taking women's empowerment into account, one way the Act may help women is by encouraging the development of small businesses such as horticultural nurseries. As a result, it would expand the number of opportunities for paid work. However, while carrying out such development, all women, including breastfeeding mothers and the elderly, should be given the same opportunity and preference for employment as single women, because the needs and expenditures of the elderly and breast-feeding women are greater than those of single women. Furthermore, when it comes to senior women, the system should take into account their physical condition when distributing jobs and offer them with jobs that are less strenuous. By providing such an equitable opportunity, all women will have an equal chance of being financially self-sufficient and empowered. The development of women's self-help groups is another potential technique for improving women's lives. Women would be able to work together in such self-help organisations, and they would also be able to contribute to the growth of small enterprises and government programmes. Furthermore, because women make up the majority of participants in the MGNREGA programme, it is only natural to include them in the planning of the program's activities. This act of incorporating women would aid in the reformation of gender relations as well as women's empowerment. One example in support of this argument is how the lack of females in the planning process in the state of Odisha has had a negative impact on the empowerment of women (Pellissery, 2011, Rath and Nanda, 2016).

Furthermore, actions should be taken to enhance existing levels of awareness, such as organising and adapting awareness programmes to fit each state, in order to achieve further transformation under the MGNREGA, and participants should be provided with sufficient working days, as the promise is to provide 100 working days per year on demand, catering to each employee's strengths and providing opportunities to develop their skills to earn higher wages. This would subsequently assist in the growth of such underprivileged groups, raising their living conditions and providing them with a better existence.

MGNREGA is one of India's most important welfare programmes, and it is regarded as the state's life in terms of inequality, socioeconomic, political, and demographic challenges, with the goal of improving the livelihood, security, and empowerment of underprivileged populations. This thesis demonstrates how difficult it is for MGNREGA to flourish if the Act is not administered in an equitable manner devoid of discrimination, corruption, lack of desire and commitment to work towards the Act's success, and if the Act has low levels of awareness. From the finding of this thesis, it becomes possible to argue that employment under the MGNREGA will only contribute to empowerment if it has a high degree of awareness and is executed fairly in a way that benefits the SC/ST and women. Only then will the programme have the ability to eliminate social and cultural disparities, resulting in a more aware, empowered, and egalitarian society.

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