

# A Study on the Empowerment of Rural Women Through Mgnres, Specifically Focusing on Sivakasi Block in Virudhunagar District

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## ABSTRACT

The main goal of the empowerment process is to alter the structure and course of institutional forces that, in a particular situation, marginalize women and other underprivileged groups. The MGNREGA is the first of its kind to guarantee wage employment to people living in rural areas, especially women. It has a favorable effect on women's employment and employment patterns in recent years. Promoting gender equality through wage employment, particularly for women, is the main goal of the "Women Employment" Act. This study explores how women are empowered culturally and economically in the study area through the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, with a particular focus on the 43 Gram panchayats in the Sivakasi block of Virudhunagar District.

**Keywords:** Women's Participation, Empowerment, Guarantee wage, Employment Programmes, and MGNREGA

## INTRODUCTION

Enacted on August 25, 2005, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is an employment guarantee program in India which gives one adult member of a rural household who is willing to perform public work, particularly unskilled manual labor, at the statutory minimum wage of Rs. 200 per day, a legal guarantee of one hundred days of employment in each fiscal year? Numerous scholarly investigations and official government publications have concentrated on the effects of MGNREGA from the viewpoint of women, specifically on the socio-economic advancements and obstacles encountered by them. The development of the rural Bharat scheme depends on the empowerment of rural women. Women themselves must take the lead in empowering themselves. When women empowered, society's stability is assured. In recent years, the MGNREGA has had a positive effect on women's employment patterns and empowerment. The Act has the potential to greatly empower women by offering highly commendable employment. This study attempts to analyze the cultural and economic advancements that would result in overall women's empowerment through MGNREGA programs and their contribution to raising women's living standards. Put another way, this program helps women feel more confident about their economic standing and social participation.

## Concepts of Empowerment

Empowerment is a multidimensional concept that involves enhancing individuals or communities with the resources, capabilities, and confidence needed to take control of their lives, make decisions, and achieve their goals. Various dimensions of empowerment include:

### 1. **Social Empowerment:**

- *Equality and Social Justice:* Ensuring equal rights and opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their background, gender, or socio-economic status.
- *Inclusion:* Fostering an inclusive society where every individual feels valued and has a sense of belonging.

### 2. **Economic Empowerment:**

- *Financial Independence:* Providing individuals with the means to support themselves economically and reducing dependency on others.
- *Entrepreneurship:* Encouraging the development of entrepreneurial skills and opportunities for economic self-sufficiency.

### 3. **Political Empowerment:**

- *Participation:* Facilitating the active involvement of individuals in political processes, decision-making, and governance.
- *Advocacy:* Empowering individuals to advocate for their rights and influence policies that affect them.

### 4. **Educational Empowerment:**

- *Knowledge and Skills:* Enhancing access to education and providing individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary for personal and professional growth.
- *Critical Thinking:* Encouraging the development of critical thinking skills that enable individuals to question, analyze, and make informed decisions.

### 5. **Psychological Empowerment:**

- *Self-Efficacy:* Fostering a sense of self-efficacy, where individuals believe in their ability to overcome challenges and achieve their goals.
- *Self-esteem:* Promoting a positive self-image and confidence in one's abilities and worth.

### 6. **Cultural Empowerment:**

- *Preservation of Identity:* Supporting the preservation of cultural heritage and identity, ensuring that individuals can maintain a connection to their roots.
- *Cultural Expression:* Encouraging the freedom to express one's culture, language, and traditions.

### 7. **Health Empowerment:**

- *Access to Healthcare:* Ensuring equitable access to healthcare services, information, and resources.
- *Health Education:* Providing knowledge and skills that empower individuals to make informed decisions about their health.

### 8. **Environmental Empowerment:**

- *Sustainable Practices:* Encouraging practices that empower individuals and communities to contribute to environmental sustainability.
- *Community Resilience:* Building resilience within communities to cope with and adapt to environmental challenges.

Empowerment is an ongoing process that requires addressing structural inequalities, promoting inclusivity, and fostering an environment that values and supports the agency of individuals and

communities. It involves not only providing resources but also creating conditions for individuals to exercise their rights, voice their concerns, and actively participate in shaping their own destinies.

### STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Women typically play a larger role in the family, especially in developing nations like India where unemployment is a major issue. The MGNREGA scheme, which the government introduced, has a greater impact on addressing the aforementioned issue. Even though the government periodically introduces more programmes for rural development to ensure the equitable regional development of rural areas, the creation of jobs, and the eradication of poverty, women continue to face numerous challenges at work and are socially, economically, and politically backward. Therefore, it is imperative to analyse how the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act has empowered women. In Sivakasi Block of the Virudhunagar District, an attempt has been made to investigate how stake holders have been empowered by this scheme.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To investigate over the beneficiaries' demographic makeup in the research area.
2. To analyse the elements of MGNREGA that empower rural women.
3. To measure women's empowerment in the cultural and economic domains

### ROLE OF MGNREGA IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in India plays a significant role in women empowerment by providing them with opportunities for economic independence and social development. Here are some key aspects of how MGNREGA contributes to women empowerment:

- 1. Employment Opportunities:** MGNREGA guarantees 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to every rural household. This ensures that women, who often face economic vulnerability, have access to regular and decent employment opportunities. Women can engage in various activities such as water conservation, land development, and other infrastructure-related work.
- 2. Financial Inclusion:** By providing regular wages for their work, MGNREGA helps in enhancing the economic status of women. The financial independence gained through MGNREGA allows women to contribute to household income, manage their finances, and make independent decisions about family expenditures.
- 3. Skill Development:** Women engaged in MGNREGA activities acquire various skills related to construction, agriculture, and infrastructure development. These skills not only make them more employable in the future but also boost their confidence and self-esteem.
- 4. Social Empowerment:** Participation in MGNREGA activities empowers women socially. They become active members of the community, participating in decision-making processes related to the selection of projects and utilization of funds. This involvement contributes to breaking down traditional gender norms and stereotypes.
- 5. Asset Creation:** MGNREGA projects often involve the creation of community assets like wells, ponds, and roads. Women, who are an integral part of the workforce, become co-owners of these assets, leading to a sense of ownership and empowerment.

6. **Reducing Gender Disparities:** MGNREGA aims to reduce gender disparities by ensuring that at least one-third of the beneficiaries are women. This policy helps in bridging the gender gap in employment opportunities and ensures that women have equal access to the benefits of the program.
7. **Improved Health and Education:** Economic empowerment through MGNREGA enables women to invest in the health and education of their families. With increased income, women can afford better healthcare and education for their children, breaking the cycle of poverty.
8. **Empowerment through Collective Action:** MGNREGA promotes the formation of self-help groups and community-based organizations. Women actively participate in these groups, fostering a sense of collective empowerment and solidarity.

While MGNREGA has played a crucial role in women empowerment; challenges such as timely payment of wages, awareness, and effective implementation still exist. Addressing these challenges can further enhance the positive impact of MGNREGA on women's lives and empowerment.

### SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study's objective is to gather data regarding the MGNREGA's empowerment of rural women; it is limited to the Sivakasi block of the Virudhnagar District. The main objective of the study was to ascertain the extent to which the programme was empowering rural women before examining actual empowerment in that particular block alone.

### SAMPLE DESIGN

The information was gathered from a single block in the Virudhunagar District of Sivakasi. Three hundred and Fifty samples were chosen from the study area's sample profile and are displayed below.

**Table 1**

SAMPLEPROFILE	
Characteristics	Number/Percentages
Total Number of workers in Sivakasi block	27325
No. of. villages coverage	137

**Source:** Compiled from DRDA, Virudhunagar district for the year 2022-23

### SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

Convenient Sampling technique was used. The weaker and more vulnerable segments of society, such as SC, ST, and others, were heavily represented in the study area.

### TOOLS USED:

- Frequency Distribution,
- Factor Analysis,
- Weighted Average Mean score,

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. **Keshlata and Syed Nadeem Fatmi**(2015) in their analytical study entitled, “The Contribution of MGNREGA in the Empowerment of the Scheduled Tribes through Poverty Alleviation and Rural Development in the Sheopur District of Madhya Pradesh: An Analytical Study” have determined

that the MGNREGA's implementation strength in Madhya Pradesh's Sheopur District. Under physical progress, employment generated per scheduled tribes showed a decline from prior financial years in terms of person days. Financial progress: During the current fiscal year, there was a decline in the total amount of funds available, the number of social audits, and the total cumulative expenditure. It is evident that Sheopur Block had the greatest number of social audits during the 2012–13 and 2013–14 fiscal years, while Karhal Block had the lowest number. Similarly, during the 2014–15 and 2013–14 fiscal years, Bijeypur Block had the highest ratio of total available funds to total cumulative expenditure, while Karhal Block had the lowest.

2. **Utpal Kumar De and Polakshi Bhattacharya**(2012) in their article titled, “Participation of Women in MGNREGA: How far is it Successful in Morigaon, Assam?” have examined the variables influencing involvement in MGNREGA activities and found that, despite the fact that women are afforded a number of protections, there is a sizable gender gap in the amount of participation. The grama sabha meeting is more interesting to the elderly than to the young, and men still dominate the decision-making process. Due to improved access to information, those with higher levels of education also participate in decision-making more than those with lower or no education. In order to make a living, members of the backward communities (SC/ST) engage in more physical activities and show less interest in attending grama sabha meetings.
3. **Pradeep Jain and Raminder Jit Singh**(2013) in their research paper titled, “Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) on the Touch Stone of Social Security” have come to the conclusion that educated individuals shouldn't be allowed to work in any unskilled capacity by the government. A sizable percentage of educated individuals participate in all categories, including those with a college degree. These people can be used for jobs that would justify their educational qualifications rather than being hired for unskilled labour. Furthermore, it won't be possible to expect uniformity in the delivery and execution of schemes the size of MGNREGA; instead, certain safeguards must be standardised and parameters fixed in order to increase the efficacy of this generous programme.
4. **Mr.M.Muthumari and Dr.S.Meenakumari and et.al**(2023) in their article entitled, “Empowerment Of Rural Women Through Mgnrega- A Study With Special Reference To Virudhunagar District” have observed that modifying the nature and direction of systematic pressures that marginalize women and other disadvantaged sections in a given context. In recent years, it has had a positive impact on women's employment and job trends. The principal objective of the "Women Employment" Act is to advance gender equality through paid employment, specifically for women. With an emphasis on the 43 Garm panchayats in the Sivakasi block of Virudhunagar District, this study examines how the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act has empowered women in the study region both culturally and economically.

#### **LIMITATION OF THE STUDY:**

Only the Sivakasi block in the Virudhunagar district is covered. This study is merely an attempt to gauge how much MGNREGA has empowered rural women, who have made significant contributions to the advancement of both the cultural and economic domains.

#### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Since there are more women beneficiaries in the study area, this study was conducted as a pilot project

in the selected block of Viradhunagar District.

### Socio–Economic Profile

The beneficiaries' socio economic background is shown below:

**Table 2**  
**Socio–Economic Profile of the Respondents**

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Age of the Respondents</b>		
18-30Years	49	11.1
31-45Years	129	39.7
46-60Years	118	39.4
Above60Years	54	9.8
<b>Caste of the Respondents</b>		
General(OC)	19	5.4
BC	147	42.0
MBC	49	14.1
SC	130	37.1
ST	5	1.4
<b>Religion of the Respondents</b>		
Hindu	330	94.3
Muslim	6	1.7
Christian	14	4.0
<b>Educational Qualification of the Respondents</b>		
Illiterate	140	40
S.S.L.C	179	51.2
HSC	12	3.4
Graduate/Others	19	5.4
<b>Card Holding</b>		
Below Poverty Line	189	54.0
Above Poverty Line	161	46.0
<b>Land Holding</b>		
Irrigated	102	28.9
UnIrrigated	100	28.5
No land	150	42.6
<b>House Types</b>		
Kaccha House	150	42.9
Pakka House	200	57.1
<b>Monthly Income of the Respondents</b>		
Upto1000	101	28.9
1001–2000	70	20
2001–5000	179	51.1
<b>Marital status of the Respondents</b>		

Married	269	76.8
Unmarried	31	8.9
Widows	50	14.3

**Source:Fieldstudy**

Table No. 2 revealed that 39.7% of workers are between the ages of 31 and 45, 39.4% are between the ages of 46 and 60, 11.1 percent are between the ages of 18 and 30, and 9.8 percent are over the age of 60. Out of 350 participants, 42% fall under BC category, 37.1% fall under SC category, 14.1% fall under MBC category, 5.4% fall under general category, and 1.4% fall under the ST category. Of the respondents, 94.3% are Hindus and 4% are Christians and Muslims make up 1.7% of the population. 51.2% of the workforce has completed up to SSLC, 40% are literates, 3.4% has completed up to the HSC, and the remaining 5.4% has completed other courses like polytechnics, diplomas, and soon. 54 percent of respondents were found to be below the poverty line and 46 percent to be above it is based on the cards they held. It is noteworthy that 57.1% of the respondents live in pakka houses, while 42.9% live in kaccha houses. Of the respondents, 42.6% have no land, 28.5% have unirrigated land, and 28.9% have irrigated land. In terms of monthly income, 28.9% of respondents make less than Rs. 1000, 20% make between Rs. 1001 and Rs. 2000, and 51.1 percent earn between Rs. 2001 and Rs. 5000.out of 350 respondents, 76.8% are married, with 14.3% of them being widow and 8.9% being single.

**Table 3:Factor Analysis-Empowerment of Rural Women through MGNREGA**

	Component		Com	Grouped as
	1	2		
Eliminating poverty	.964		.885	<b>Economic &amp; Cultural women empowerment</b>
Increased earnings	.920		.870	
An improvement in the socioeconomic environment	.948		.899	
Gives the impoverished basic consumption stability	.949		.894	
Raises the amount spent on consumption and the accumulation of assets	.923		.858	
In terms of pay equally	.924		.878	
Improvement of credit outreach	.925		.860	
Encourages a sense of team spirit	.935		.882	
Raises the standard of living in rural areas	.907		.826	
Increases the rural community's sense of confidence	.968		.940	
Aids in cultivating a positive outlook	.960		.920	
Establishing moral guidelines	.980		.960	
Effects inside the home: women's access to paid employment		.957	.913	

improves their ability to make decisions at home				<b>Social empowerment</b>
Community effects (a rise in the number of people participating in local governance)		.941	.905	
Strengthens the bonds between women		.952	.908	
Working in the field and aids in the struggle against discrimination and violence		.945	.874	
Recognised informal & informal sectors of the society		.933	.872	
Flexibility in the type of work that women do in a family setting		.925	.856	<b>Overall empowerment</b>
Removes or minimises employee migration		.821	.755	
Health insurance coverage at work			.951	
Greater prioritisation is ensured by a higher percentage of female workers.		.985	.916	
Reduces or eliminates discrimination and raises worker equality.		.922	.907	
Allows family members to become healthier by providing them with better nutrition		.958	.912	
Eigen value	<b>16.111</b>	<b>2.790</b>		
Percentage of variance	<b>70.046</b>	<b>12.130</b>		
Cumulative	<b>70.041</b>	<b>82.176</b>		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olk in Measure of Sampling Adequacy.				<b>.917</b>
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.				

**Source: Computed data**

With a KMO statistic of 0.917, which is considerably higher than the minimum suggested by Kaiser (1974), the sample size was deemed sufficient for factor analysis. Additionally, the Bartlett's test of sphericity was found to be significant at one percent, demonstrating the existence of a relationship between the variables necessary to perform factor analysis. All of the variables had values greater than 0.50, indicating that a significant portion of the variance is accounted for by the factors. The communalities for each variable were evaluated to determine the amount of variance accounted by the



variables to be included in the factor rotations.

The three factors' eigen values are greater than 1. Thus, these three factors have been kept for additional research by the researcher. Eighty-one percent of the variance is explained by the two factors. This reasonable percentage of variance to be explained is predicated on the suitability of the factor analysis.

### FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

1. The investigation reveals that 45.4% of respondents are from the backward class, and 39.7% of respondents are between the ages of 31 and 45. A significant majority of the respondents—54 percent—is above the non-poor line, nearly 96 percent are Hindu, and 39.4 percent do not own any land. Of the respondents, over half have only completed their eighth grade of education. Three-fourths of the respondents are married, more than half have a monthly income between 2001 and 5000, and the majority of respondents—60 percent—live in pakka houses.
2. The study on rural women's empowerment through MGNREGA provides a clear understanding of the ways in which economic independence influences both cultural and general empowerment. Additionally, the fit indices obtained in its validation using second order confirmatory factor analysis are found for eleven items.
3. The study also suggests that most respondents view holistic empowerment of women as real empowerment, which is followed by increased decision-making authority and remoralization of social, regional, and gender gaps through active community participation.

### RECOMMENDATIONS AND FINAL COMMENTS:

1. In India, women play a significant role in society. They are the most powerful working women and secondary citizens. The MGNREGA has opened up new opportunities for rural women to achieve social recognition by involving them in community-based projects. Even though MGNREGA has become a very effective tool for women's empowerment, special provisions must be made for widows, women with disabilities, and single women under the new MGNREGA program. This will enable them to use the money they earn from MGNREGA work to maintain control over household resources and, consequently, the health, education, and nutrition of their families.
2. MGNREGA improved the socioeconomic circumstances of the women. It makes it possible for the recipients to improve their mindset, lowers the rate of poverty by creating jobs, and increases consumer spending. Sustained public initiatives, effective levels of women's empowerment, and awareness are essential to guaranteeing that the goals are achieved and that the implementation issues are not only acknowledged but also fixed. The distribution of sample households on actual empowerment is shown in Table 3. It's interesting to note that although overall empowerment in the study area is ranked highest, there was still a noticeable level of empowerment in terms of social registration.

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