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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR)

Article DOI:10.21474/IJAR01/24277
DOI URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/24277>



RESEARCH ARTICLE

STUDY ON MGNREGP TO IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE AND EMPLOYMENT OF REGULAR LABOURERS IN SELECTED BLOCKS OF TIRUNELVELI DISTRICT

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Manuscript Info

Manuscript History

Received: 18 July 2026

Final Accepted: 20 August 2026

Published: September 2026

Key words:-

MGNREGP, Scheduled tribes,
Employment, Panchayat

Abstract

The study aims that MGNREGP in enhancing employment and quality of life of the scheduled tribes' people in the rural areas. The objective of study is socio – economic and living conditions of the selected Scheduled tribes' population. To conclude, the study of tribal households has occupied a pre-eminent position in social sciences. The interest envisaged by social scientists in explaining the origin and behaviour of the tribal population is centuries old. The economic status of the tribal population is determined by a complex set of socio-economic, cultural, religious and ecological factors. There have been various attempts at empirical levels to explain the nature and behaviour of tribal population and to measure the nature of changes in their life style behaviour. While studies abounds in explaining the socio-economic conditions of tribal population and the impact of governmental measures in improving their economic status, very few studies have been done at the micro level in the state of Tamil Nadu. The present study, a modest attempt to explain the employment status and quality of life of tribal population in Tirunelveli district, is an effort to collect research and evidence on their present conditions at the micro level. The estimated chi – square values reveal that MGNREGP beneficiaries in Nanguneri block significantly differed from Valliyoor block with respect to both social and demographic factors.

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While the beneficiaries in Nanguneri block were predominantly females, married, having larger family, high dependency ratio, lower educational status, engaged in non – farm activities and having higher family income, the beneficiaries in Valliyoor block belonged to nuclear family, having lower dependency ratio, marginally higher educational status, engaged in farm activities and having lower average family income. But the major concerns includes inadequate transfer, distress migration, work related tensions between family members, not flexible to household and productive activities, no child care provisions, no worksite facilities and delay in payment. In spite of these lacunae MGNREGP is the best institutional mechanism available to cope up with the profound challenges India will face in the coming years.

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Introduction:-

One of the flagship poverty alleviation programmes of the Government of India is MGNREGP. It is an India job guarantee scheme enacted by legislation on 25th August 2005. The scheme provides a legal guarantee of at least one hundred days of employment in every financial year to adult members of any rural households willing to do public work-related unskilled manual work at a statutory minimum wages of Rs. 273 per day in 2021-22 prices. The Act covered 200 districts in its first phase, on February 2, 2006 and was extended to all the rural districts of the country in phases. It was enacted to reinforce the commitment towards livelihood security in rural areas. MGNREGP is the most significant legislation in many ways. For the first time, rural communities have been given not just a development programme but a regime of rights also.

The MGNREGP is the legal guarantee that people can use to secure their entitlement of wage employment. It holds the Government responsible for making employment available to the people. It is a legal instrument in the hands of the poor based on the demand of the workers. Under MGNREGP apart from guaranteeing 100 days of wage employment, the Panchayat Raj institutions have been vested with the responsibility of planning, implementation and monitoring of activities taken up under the scheme. MGNREGP made the demand factor a conscious strategy as a right to obtained employment. Financial obligations both of the centre and state are part of the legal framework. The MGNREGP guidelines also detail operational and administrative modalities of implementation seeking to address the limitations of the earlier wage employment programmes, placing greater emphasis, for example on planning processes, and MIS for improving data management.

During the financial year the women workforce participation under the Scheme has surpassed the statutory minimum requirement of 33 percent and the trends indicate an increase in the participation rate at the national level. Since inception, every year women's participation has been around 48 percent. MGNREGP is the first ever law, internationally, that guarantees wage employment at an unprecedented scale. The primary objective of the Act is meeting demand for wage employment in rural areas. The work permitted under the Act address causes of chronic poverty like drought, deforestation and soil erosion, so that the employment generation is sustainable. The Act is also a significant vehicle for strengthening decentralization and deepening processes of democracy by giving a pivotal role to local governance bodies, that is, the Panchayat Raj Institutions. MGNREGA has also been a vehicle for inclusive growth and the marginalized sections of society have high percentage of participation under this Act.

Methodology:-

The stratified sampling technique was adopted for selecting the sample. Based on the man- days working under MGNREGP, Tirunelveli was purposively selected for the study for there a son that more number of people was relying on this scheme and very less research had been conducted scheduled tribes in the study area. Moreover, the scheme was successfully operating in Tirunelveli district. In the first, out off nine blocks in tirunelveli district, two blocks, namely Nanguneri and Valliyoor blocks were purposively selected where there was larger concentration of scheduled tribes population and compare to other block. About 130 Scheduled tribe households are in two blocks. Then, village Panchayat from each block was selected based on their participation in MGNREGP. Out of 27 villages in Nanguneri block, Similarly, out of 18 villages in valliyoor block, Totally 98 sample, 75 per cent of households were selected for field survey from the study area to Cochran's Formula. The data for the study was collected from the selected respondents by administering a pretested interview schedule during 2020-2021.

Review of Literatures:-

Anindita Barman, et al., (2020) reveals that in summing up it can be said that providing an employment opportunity and poverty alleviation remains one of great challenge to developing countries like India, however government attempts to control over the problem of rural area. The study primarily aims to analyses the objectives, socio economic background, benefit as well as the prospects of strategies of MGNREGA in rural employment. The study has been carried out in the Rupiabathan village of Nalbari district of Assam. MGNREGA: playing pivotal role in rural employment generation and developed standard of living in Rupiabathan village.

MGNREGA has brought productive changes in the respondents in terms of house, increase monthly household income, education, increase monthly expenditure on food items, improvement in fuel use for cooking, improvement in the source of drinking water, improvement in the use toilet facility, improvement on lighting etc. The women participation ratio in program has been increased in the Rupiabathan village. But in some cases women get less wage than men. It is found that MGNREGA helps to generating wage employment in Rupiabathan village of Nalbari district. MGNREGA is executed in a proper way as in Rupiabathan village, it can reduce poverty at the bottom. But

it is found that some of the respondents get unemployment allowance but some of them were not aware about that. Those who get unemployment allowance they also not getting equal amount of money because of corruption. The administration needs to show more seriousness in the point of view towards the MGNREGA scheme. Harish .N, et al., (2020) in his article reveals that India's one of the most ambitious anti-poverty intervention programs namely Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), has been implemented at some point in the 12 months of 2006 and blanketed five districts in its first section of implementation. In the beginning, the program was once famous in very few districts solely; however, over the 12 months program has failed pleasant of their objectives for 100 percent success. Based on the facts extensively on hand in the public domain and analyzed in this chapter, delineate that program has not achieved its a hundred days of employment to every household and Job Cards.

Even the number of days of work is also failed in asset creation for rural development as a whole. Over ten years for 2006-07 to 2015-16, the wage rate appreciably expanded at initial years; however, in successive years, the wage charge growth in rural areas was once not sufficient as of the city area. But, it can't be overlooked that program has been benefited rural households throughout the country's wishes enhance to the quicker advancement of rural Karnataka and India as well. Kumar and Haorei (2010) in their study of impact assessment of MGNREGA on rural migration reported that majority of the scheme's beneficiary respondents in Tamil Nadu were in the age group of 36-65 that is 58 percent and the rest 42 percent respondents were in the age group of 18-35. Pattanaik (2009) in his study on NREGA in Hoshiarpur District of Punjab reported that, 25, 56 percent and 40.00 percent of the youth were in the age group of less than 30 years and 31-40 years respectively. Thus youth were largest beneficiaries of the scheme.

Rajanna and Ramesh (2009) in their study of NREGP-Facet of inclusive growth in Karimnagar district, Andhra Pradesh reported that 39 percent of the respondents are from the age of 30-40 years, 35 percent are from 20-30 years of age and rest of them is in the age group of 40-50 years. This shows that majority of the respondents are below 40 years of age. Sankari and Murgan (2009) studied the impact of NREGA in Udangudi Panchayat union of Tamil Nadu and reported that 40 Percent of the beneficiary's belonged to the age group of 26 to 35 years. Maulik (2009) reported in Barbanki district, Uttar Pradesh that, more than half of house holds who had registered for NREGA belonged to scheduled caste (56.85%), the share of other community and the tribes was 40.04 percent and 3.11 percent respectively.

Rajanna and Ramesh (2009) reported that in Karimnagar district of Andhra Pradesh. 51.60 percent of the NREGA respondents were from backward class communities, and 46.60 percent of respondents were from SC category and rests were from ST and other communities. Jadhav (2008) concluded that there is no discrimination on caste or gender in providing work. However, there are instances, as observed in a field study from the Marathwada region in Maharashtra that the upper castes were favoured at the time of allocation of work by allowing them to work on soft soil worksites, while the lower castes were given hard soil ones. Joseph and Easwaran (2006) studied Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) in Aizwal district of Mizoram and reported that majority of the respondents were aged between 40 and 60 years, followed by 30.77 percent falling below 40 years and 15.38 percent falling above 60 years. The mean age of members were found to be 48 years.

Shah (1989) concluded that the beneficiaries, scheduled caste persons formed 40.00 per cent, scheduled tribes 18.00 per cent and women 20 per cent. As high as 46.00 per cent of employment generated was for the landless workers. Governments and development partners are increasingly looking forward to PEP to provide a short-term response to this challenge, pending economic restructuring, and the prevalent PEP design norms, particularly in SSA, are proving inadequate in terms of the scale and duration of the support they offer. There is an urgent need for rethinking the PEP paradigm and MGNREGA provides alternate modes of conceptualisation, design, and implementation which are perhaps better suited and more responsive to the needs of vulnerable workers in the realities of the current global labour market.

Innovation in response to these challenges has also been taking place in key programmes in SSA, which have had the space to experiment with alternative design and implementation approaches with support from national governments who perceive PEP as a critical instrument to address the challenge of working-age poverty. These programmes can also offer lessons to the broader SSA PEP community, as well as MGNREGA, creating an opportunity for a two-way dialogue on programming to meet the challenges of the future.

TABLE – 1 SOCIO – ECONOMIC PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS (In Percentage)

S.No	Particulars		Nanguneri Block	Valliyoar Block	All
1	Gender	Male	31.2	44.3	38.6
		Female	68.8	55.7	61.4
2	Religion	Hindus	95	98.9	97.2
		Christians	5	1.1	2.8
		Muslims	0	0	0
3	Type of family	Nuclear family	82.6	88.3	85.8
		Joint family	17.4	11.7	14.2
4	Marital status	Single	4.1	17.4	11.6
		Married	90.8	81.6	85.6
		Widow	5	1.1	2.8
5	Family size	Less than 4 members	78.4	82.3	80.6
		5 or more members	21.6	17.7	19.4
		Average size of the family (in numbers)	3.88	3.45	3.64
6	Age composition of family members (inyears)	0 to 14	19.2	14.7	16.7
		15 to 59	67.7	77.8	73.3
		60 and Above	13.1	7.5	10
		Dependency ratio	47.68	28.53	36.5
7	Education Status	Illiterate	83.5	84.8	84.2
		Primary school	12.8	7.8	10
		Secondary school	2.8	4.6	3.8
		Hr.Sec. school	0.9	2.8	2
8	Occupation of the Head of the family	Farm work	69.7	93.3	83
		Nonfarm work	27.1	2.5	13.2
		Unemployed	3.2	4.3	3.8
9	Total Family income (inRs):	Less than 2000	4.6	2.5	3.4
		2000 to 4000	60.6	77.7	70.2
		4000 and above	34.8	19.8	26.4
		Average family income (in Rs.):	4027.98	3402.3	3675.1

Source: Estimation based on field Survey, 2022

Gender of the beneficiary:-

Out of 100 households surveyed 61.4 percent of the beneficiaries were females and 38.6 percent were males. The proportions of female beneficiaries were more compared to male beneficiaries in both the blocks. Thus the beneficiaries of MGNREGA were mostly women.

Religion:-

It has always played an important role in shaping the attitude and behavior pattern of the people. Data pertaining to religion of the respondents reveals that 97.2 percent of the respondents were Hindus, followed by Christians (2.8 percent). Block - wise analysis also reveals that more than 90 percent of the beneficiary households in both the blocks belonged to Hindu religion.

Type of family:-

In India has been changing very fast both in terms of its structure and functions due to a multiplicity of factors. Joint family system which used to characterize the rural society is gradually being replaced by the nuclear family consisting of husband, wife and their unmarried children only. Information relating to type of family of the respondents reveals that 85.8 percent of the respondents belonged to nuclear family and remaining 14.2 percent belonged to joint family. More than 80 percent of the beneficiary households in both the blocks belonged to nuclear family. Modernization and disintegration of joint family system has paved the way for emergence of nuclear family among the tribal households.

Marital status:-

Marriage is an important event particularly from the stand point of additional burden of responsibility on the marriage partners to pull together as constituent of a new family. Marriage brings about a number of changes in the attitude and behavior patterns of the people, especially from the point of view of engaging in gainful economic activities yielding income and providing opportunities for independent expenditure. Information relating to marital status highlights that 90.8 percent of the respondents in the Nanguneri block were married, 5 percent respondents were widows and 4.1 percent of the respondents were unmarried. In Valliyoor block 81.6 percent of the respondents were married, 1 percent of the respondents were widows and 17.4 percent of the respondents were unmarried. The proportions of unmarried beneficiaries were predominant in Valliyoor block.

Family size:-

Size of the households assumes significance since in a large household, particularly with a large number of dependents and unemployed persons, the pressure of meeting the economic burden of household expenses on the head of the household is high, providing a motivation for extra efforts to add to the overall income by adopting more than one occupation or by expanding the existing occupation or by shifting to more economically gainful employment. Information gathered regarding the size of household of the respondents highlights that largest group of the respondents in Nanguneri block (78 percent) and Valliyoor block (82 percent) households have been formed by those having less than 4 members. About 22 percent of the households in Nanguneri block and 18 percent of the households in Valliyoor block have been formed by more than 5 members. The average size of the family was marginally higher (3.88) for Nanguneri block than for the Valliyoor block (3.45). Thus the survey reveals that tribal households were practicing small family norms.

Age composition of the household member:-

An understanding of the age composition of the households enables us to know the dependency status and thereby clarify the nature and extent of pressure for increasing the earnings. Data pertaining to age composition of the members in the households of the respondents highlights that the single largest groups of the family members in the Nanguneri (67.7 percent) and in Valliyoor (77.8 percent) blocks were in the active age group of 15 to 59 years. The proportion of members in the age group of less than 14 years was 19.2 percent in Nanguneri block and 14.7 percent in the Valliyoor block. Similarly the proportion of members above 60 years was 13.1 percent and 7.5 percent respectively in the Nanguneri block and Valliyoor block. The dependency ratio was significantly higher for Nanguneri block (47.68) when compared to Valliyoor block (28.53).

Educational status of the respondents:-

Education not only creates knowledge and understanding but also generates attitude and behavior patterns and thereby plays an important role in all kinds of decision. Information concerning the highest level of education of the respondents unravels that 83.5 percent of beneficiaries were illiterate and 12.8 percent studied up to primary level in Nanguneri block and this percentage in Valliyoor Block was 84.8 percent and 7.8 percent respectively. Thus, the illiteracy was quite rampant in both the blocks with the incidence of illiteracy being marginally higher in Valliyoor block. None of the beneficiaries had completed higher secondary or higher levels of education.

Occupation:-

Is essential for survival because it is a means of earning livelihood. Occupation-wise, the rural households have hardly any choice. Most of them are engaged in agriculture and allied activities. Secondary and tertiary occupations have very limited penetration as sources of livelihood, though nearness to urban centers provides some job opportunities especially for male workers. Information concerning the occupation of the head of the family reveals that 69.7 percent of the households in Nanguneri block were engaged in farm activity while this percentage was 93.3 percent in Valliyoor block. About 27.1 percent of the households in Nanguneri block and 2.5 percent of the households in Valliyoor block were engaged in non-farm activity. While 3.2 percent households were unemployed in Nanguneri block this proportion was 4.3 percent households in Valliyoor block. Thus the proportion of people engaged in farm activities and proportion unemployed were more in Valliyoor block. Increasing dependence on farm activities which deprives them year round employments have driven them to find some alternative jobs to meet their basic subsistence.

Total Family Income:-

Level of income is an important indicator of economic welfare. Hence an analysis of income becomes the key stone of any comprehensive study. The analysis of the total family income of the respondents reveals that while 60.6 percent of the households in Nanguneri block and 77.7 percent of the households in Valliyoor block belonged to the income bracket of Rs. 2000 to 4000, the proportion of family earning more than Rs. 4000 per month was 34.8 percent

in Nanguneri block and 19.8 percent in Valliyoor block. The respondents in the Nanguneri block had the highest average family income of Rs. 4027.98 and it was least for the respondents in Valliyoor block (Rs.3402.30). The low average income of the households implies that most of the beneficiaries in both the blocks belonged to the lower strata in the society..

Findings:-

- Out of 500 households surveyed 61.4 percent of the beneficiaries were females and 38.6 percent were males. The proportions of female beneficiaries were more compared to male beneficiaries in both the blocks.
- More than 90 percent of the beneficiary households in both the blocks belonged to Hindu religion and more than 80 percent of them in both the blocks belonged to nuclear family. Modernization and disintegration of joint family system had paved the way for the emergence of nuclear family among the tribal households.
- Information relating to marital status highlights that 90.8 percent of the respondents in the Nanguneri block were married and 4.1 percent were unmarried. In contrast in Valliyoor block 81.6 percent were married and 17.4 percent were unmarried. The proportions of unmarried beneficiaries were predominant in Valliyoor block.
- The average size of the family was marginally higher (3.88) for Nanguneri block than for the Valliyoor block (3.45). These figures indicate that tribal households were practicing small family norms. The dependency ratio was significantly higher for Nanguneri block (47.68) when compared to Valliyoor block (28.53).
- About 83.5 percent of beneficiaries were illiterate and 12.8 percent studied up to primary level in Nanguneri block. In contrast about 84.8 percent of beneficiaries were illiterate and 7.8 percent of beneficiaries have studied up to primary level in Valliyoor block. Thus, the illiteracy was quite rampant in both the blocks with the incidence of illiteracy being marginally higher in Nanguneri block. None of the beneficiaries had completed higher secondary or higher levels of education.
- About 69.7 percent of the households in Nanguneri block were engaged in farm activity while this percentage was 93.3 percent in Valliyoor block. About 27.1 percent of the households in Nanguneri block and 2.5 percent of the households in Valliyoor block were engaged in non-farm activity and the remaining 3.2 percent in Nanguneri block and 4.3 percent in Valliyoor block were unemployed. Thus the proportion of people engaged in farm activities and proportion unemployed were more in Valliyoor block.
- The respondents in Nanguneri block had the highest average family income of Rs.4027.98 and it was least for the respondents in Valliyoor block (Rs. 3402.30). The low average income of the households implies that most of the beneficiaries in both the blocks belonged to the lower strata in the society.
- The estimated chi – square values reveal that MGNREGP beneficiaries in Nanguneri block significantly differed from Valliyoor block with respect to both social and demographic factors. While the beneficiaries in Nanguneri block were predominantly females, married, having larger family, high dependency ratio, lower educational status, engaged in non – farm activities and having higher family income, the beneficiaries in Valliyoor block belonged to nuclear family, having lower dependency ratio, marginally higher educational status, engaged in farm activities and having lower average family income.

Suggestions:-

1. Mandatory Mobile Creches and Child Care: Your findings note that the complete absence of child care provisions creates operational stress for families. Local Panchayats must mandate active, shaded mobile crèches at every active worksite. Appointing elderly or semi-abled tribal women as dedicated child-care attendants (which still counts toward MGNREGA wage days) will ensure infant safety and allow mothers to work productively.
2. Decent Worksite Facilities: Address the lack of basic infrastructure by stringently enforcing the provision of clean drinking water, protective gear (like footwear and gloves for handling hard soil), first-aid kits, and temporary resting shelters.
3. Eradication of Wage Delays: Payment delays severely affect these low-income strata families who survive on an average monthly income of ₹3,400 to ₹4,027. The state must implement a strict Electronic Fund Management System (e-FMS) timeline. Delays beyond 15 days should automatically trigger the statutory delay compensation directly payable to the tribal labourers.
4. Upward Wage Revision: Since the study indicates that financial gains in terms of family savings and overall asset creation remain highly modest, the statutory minimum wage should be periodically indexed against local market inflation to ensure meaningful livelihood enhancement.
5. Mitigation of Distress Migration: By aligning the local MGNREGA work calendar with the lean agricultural seasons of the Tirunelveli district, the administration can reliably offer the guaranteed 100 days when farm

work dries up. This keeps families structurally secure in their home villages and systematically curbs seasonal distress migration.

Conclusion:-

To sum up, under the MGNREGP the sample beneficiaries have marginally gained in terms of better employment opportunities and increased days of employment, while the benefits in terms of income, savings and expenditure has been very modest. The major benefits as perceived by the beneficiaries of MGNREGP include improvement in quality of life, economic self-reliance and better community life. But the major concerns includes inadequate transfer, distress migration, work related tensions between family members, not flexible to household and productive activities, no child care provisions, no worksite facilities and delay in payment. In spite of these lacunae MGNREGP is the best institutional mechanism available to cope up with the profound challenges India will face in the coming years. There is huge potential for using the MGNREG programme as an approach to reduce the vulnerability in the livelihood of tribal household both the short term and longterm.

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