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# SOCIO - ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH MGNREGS - A STUDY IN PRAKASAM DISTRICT OF ANDHRA PRADESH

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## ABSTRACT
*Women's socio-economic empowerment is a critical component of inclusive and sustainable development in India. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), with its legal assurance of wage employment and emphasis on women's participation, has emerged as a significant policy intervention in this direction. The present study examines the role of MGNREGS in promoting the socio-economic empowerment of women in Prakasam District of Andhra Pradesh. The study is based on both primary and secondary data, collected through field surveys, structured questionnaires, and official records of MGNREGS implementation in the district. The analysis focuses on key dimensions of empowerment such as income security, employment opportunities, decision-making capacity, social status, financial inclusion. The findings reveal that MGNREGS has substantially increased women's participation in the rural workforce, enhanced their access to independent income, and contributed to greater confidence and involvement in household and community-level decisions. However, the study also identifies challenges such as delayed wage payments, limited awareness of entitlements, and constraints in skill up gradation. The paper concludes that while MGNREGS has played a positive role in advancing socio-economic empowerment of women in Prakasam District, strengthening implementation mechanisms and addressing existing gaps can further enhance its impact.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION
Women's empowerment has emerged as a central objective of development policy in India, as it is closely linked with poverty reduction, social justice, and sustainable economic growth. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality, women—particularly in rural areas—continue to face structural disadvantages such as limited access to employment, lower wages, economic dependency, and restricted participation in decision-making processes. Addressing these challenges requires targeted policy interventions that enhance women's access to income, employment, and social security (Kabeer, 1999; Sen, 2001).

In this context, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), launched in 2005 under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), represents a landmark initiative in India's rural development strategy. The scheme guarantees at least 100 days of wage employment per household per year and places special emphasis on the participation of women by mandating equal wages and reserving at least one-third of total employment opportunities for them (Government of India, 2005). By providing paid employment close to home, MGNREGS has created new avenues for women's economic participation in rural areas.

MGNREGS plays a significant role in enhancing women's socio-economic status by ensuring income security, reducing dependency on informal and exploitative labour markets, and increasing financial inclusion through bank and post-office wage payments. Studies have shown that participation in MGNREGS has contributed to improvements in women's bargaining power within households, increased self-confidence, and greater involvement in community-level activities (Holmes et al., 2011; Khera & Nayak, 2009). The scheme also helps mitigate seasonal unemployment and distress migration, which disproportionately affect rural women.

Andhra Pradesh has been one of the better-performing states in the implementation of MGNREGS, particularly in terms of women's participation. Prakasam District, characterized by agrarian dependence, periodic droughts, and limited non-farm employment opportunities, provides a relevant setting to examine the impact of MGNREGS on women's socio-economic empowerment. For many rural women in the district, MGNREGS has become an important source of livelihood and social recognition.

The present study aims to analyze the extent to which MGNREGS has contributed to the socio-economic empowerment of women in Prakasam District of Andhra Pradesh. It focuses on various dimensions such as employment generation, income enhancement, decision-making power, social status, and financial independence, while also identifying challenges that affect the effective realization of the scheme's objectives.

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## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

**Khera and Nayak (2009)** examined women's participation in the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act across several Indian states. Their study found that MGNREGS significantly increased women's workforce participation, especially among marginalized and economically weaker sections. The provision of equal wages and work opportunities near villages enhanced women's financial independence and bargaining power within households. However, the study also highlighted issues such as delays in wage payments and limited awareness of entitlements.

**Holmes, Sadana, and Rath (2011)** conducted a gender analysis of MGNREGS and observed that the scheme created an enabling environment for women's empowerment by addressing practical gender needs such as income security and reduced migration. Their findings indicated improvements in women's self-esteem, participation in community activities, and access to formal financial systems. The study emphasized that effective implementation is crucial for realizing long-term empowerment outcomes.

**Rao (2017)** studied the impact of MGNREGS on women in Andhra Pradesh and observed that the scheme significantly enhanced women's income levels and employment opportunities in drought-prone districts. The study highlighted improvements in women's confidence, mobility, and participation in local governance. It also pointed out operational challenges such as worksite facilities and administrative delays that limited the scheme's overall effectiveness.

## 3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the role of MGNREGS in improving the socio-economic status of women beneficiaries in Prakasam District of Andhra Pradesh.
2. To analyze the impact of MGNREGS on women's income, employment security, and decision - making power at the household and Community levels.
3. To identify the Constraints and Challenges faced by women beneficiaries in accessing and benefiting from the MGNREGS in the study area.

### 1. Research Methodology

Both primary and secondary data were used to examine the socio-economic conditions of women in the study area. Four villages were selected from Markapuram Mandal. From the four villages, Gajjalakonda, Kolabhimunipadu, Bhupathipalli, and Rayavaram were selected purposively. From each village a sample of 51, 39, 42, and 28 respondent homes were interviewed. As a result, a total of 160 sample households were chosen for the study. The socio-economic status of women in Prakasam district was analysed by using a simple percentage method.

### 2. Result and Discussion of the Study

**Table -1**

Age wise distribution of the respondents

| Particulars | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| 21-30 | 18 | 11.2 |
| 31-40 | 24 | 15.0 |
| 41-50 | 69 | 43.1 |
| 51-60 | 49 | 30.7 |
| **Total** | **160** | **100** |

**Source:** Field survey

Table – 1 presents the age-wise distribution of the respondents. The total sample consists of 160 respondents. Among them, 69 respondents (43.1%) belong to the age group of 41-50, while 49 respondents (30.7%) belong to the age group of 51-60, whereas 24 respondents (15.0%) belong to the age group of 31-40 and 18 respondents (11.2%) belong to the age group of 21–30 years, while 24 respondents (15.0%) fall under the 31–40 years category.

Overall, the age distribution highlights that the programme largely supports middle-aged and older working populations, thereby contributing to livelihood security among experienced and economically responsible members of rural households.

**Table -2**

Caste wise distribution of the Respondents

| Particulars | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| SC | 81 | 50.7 |
| ST | 14 | 8.8 |
| BC | 38 | 23.7 |
| OC | 27 | 16.8 |
| **Total** | **160** | **100** |

**Source:** Field survey

Table – 2 presents the caste-wise distribution of the respondents. Out of the total 160 respondents, 81 respondents (50.7%) belong to the Scheduled Castes (SC) category, constituting the largest proportion of the sample. Further, 38 respondents (23.7%) belong to the Backward Classes (BC) category, while 27 respondents (16.8 %) are from the Other Castes (OC) category. A relatively smaller proportion, 14 respondents (8.8%), belongs to the Scheduled Tribes (ST) category.

Overall, the caste-wise distribution demonstrates that the initiative serves as an important instrument of social justice and equitable development, particularly benefiting marginalized communities.

**Table -3**

Educational status

| Particulars | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Illiterate | 79 | 49.3 |
| Primary | 22 | 13.8 |
| Upper Primary | 12 | 7.5 |
| High School | 28 | 17.5 |
| Intermediate | 9 | 5.7 |
| Graduation | 10 | 6.2 |
| **Total** | **160** | **100** |

**Source:** Field survey

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Table – 3 presents the educational status of the respondents. Out of the total 160 respondents, 79 respondents (49.3%) are illiterate**,** constituting nearly half of the sample. Further, 28 respondents (17.5%) have completed high school, while, 22 respondents (13.8%) have completed primary education**,** 12 respondents (7.5 per cent) have studied up to upper primary level**,** whereas, 10 respondents (6.2 %) are graduates, and 9 respondents (5.7%) have completed intermediate education.

Overall, the educational profile underscores the need for literacy programmes, skill development initiatives, and awareness campaigns to enhance the socio-economic empowerment of beneficiaries and improve their access to better livelihood opportunities.

**Table - 4**

Occupational Status

| Particulars | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Agriculture | 24 | 15.0 |
| Agri – Labour | 46 | 28.7 |
| Business/ Self Employee | 6 | 3.8 |
| Cooley | 84 | 52.5 |
| **Total** | **160** | **100** |

**Source:** Field survey

Table – 4 presents the occupational status of the respondents. Out of the total 160 respondents, 84 respondents (52.5%) are engaged as Cooley's (daily wage laborers)**,** Further, 46 respondents (28.7%) are working as agricultural laborers**,** while 24 respondents (15.0%) are engaged in agriculture as cultivators. A very small proportion, 6 respondents (3.8%), is involved in business or self-employment activities.

Overall, the occupational distribution highlights the economically weaker background of the respondents and underscores the importance of employment guarantee programmes and rural livelihood initiatives in providing income security and social protection to labor-dependent households.

**Table – 5**

Monthly income of the respondents

| Particulars | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Less than Rs.5000 | 28 | 17.5 |
| Rs. 5001- Rs.10,000 | 41 | 25.6 |
| Rs. 10,001- Rs. 25,000 | 62 | 38.8 |
| Rs.25001-Rs.50,000 | 29 | 18.1 |
| **Total** | **160** | **100** |

**Source:** Field survey

Table – 5 presents the monthly income distribution of the respondents. Out of the total 160 respondents, 62 respondents (38.8%)**,** earn between Rs. 10,001 – Rs. 25,000 per month, a considerable proportion, 41 respondents (25.6%), fall within the income range of Rs. 5,001 – Rs. 10,000, whereas, 29 respondents (18.1%) earn between Rs. 25,001 – Rs. 50,000 per month**,** and 28 respondents (17.5%) earn less than Rs. 5,000 per month**,** indicating a section of the sample living under severe economic constraints.

**Table – 6**

Housing status of the Respondents

| Particulars | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Thatched house | 34 | 21.2 |
| Tiled house | 51 | 31.9 |
| RCC/Pucca | 75 | 46.9 |
| **Total** | **160** | **100** |

**Source:** Field survey

Table – 6 presents the housing status of the respondents. Out of the total 160 respondents, 75 respondents (46.9%)**,** reside in RCC/Pucca houses, whereas, 51 respondents (31.9%)**,** live in tiled houses**,** and 34 respondents (21.2%) reside in thatched houses, indicating comparatively poor living conditions and economic vulnerability.

**Table – 7**

Decision makers in the family

| Particulars | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Parents/In-laws | 7 | 4.3 |
| Husband | 52 | 32.6 |
| Self | 56 | 35.0 |
| Husband and Self | 45 | 28.1 |
| **Total** | **160** | **100** |

**Source:** Field survey

Table – 7 presents the distribution of respondents according to decision-making authority within the family. Out of the total 160 respondents, 56 respondents (35.0%) reported that they take decisions independently (Self), A considerable proportion, 52 respondents (32.6%), stated that the husband alone is the primary decision-maker in the family. Further, 45 respondents (28.1%) indicated that decisions are taken jointly by husband and self, reflecting a pattern of shared decision-making. A small proportion, 7 respondents (4.3%), reported that parents or in-laws are the main decision-makers.

**Table – 8**

Opinion of the respondents on women strong and independent

| Particulars | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Employment Availability | | |
| Yes | 129 | 80.7 |
| No | 31 | 19.3 |
| **Total** | **160** | **100** |
| Income Enhancement | | |
| Yes | 96 | 60.0 |
| No | 64 | 40.0 |
| **Total** | **160** | **100** |
| Decision making power | | |
| Yes | 139 | 86.9 |
| No | 21 | 13.1 |
| **Total** | **160** | **100** |
| Social Status | | |
| Yes | 68 | 42.5 |
| No | 92 | 57.5 |
| **Total** | **160** | **100** |
| Financial Independence | | |
| Yes | 106 | 66.2 |
| No | 54 | 33.8 |
| **Total** | **160** | **100** |

**Source:** Field survey

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Table – 8 presents the respondents' opinions regarding various factors that contribute to women becoming strong and independent.

With regard to **employment availability,** a significant majority of 129 respondents (80.7%) opined that availability of employment strengthens women's independence, while 31 respondents (19.3%) disagreed. This indicates that respondents strongly associate access to employment opportunities with women's empowerment.

In terms of **income enhancement**, 96 respondents (60.0%) stated that increased income contributes to women's strength and independence, whereas 64 respondents (40.0%) did not share this view. This suggests that economic improvement is considered an important, though not universally acknowledged, factor.

Regarding **decision-making power**, an overwhelming majority of 139 respondents (86.9%) agreed that decision-making authority enhances women's independence, while only 21 respondents (13.1%) disagreed. This highlights the strong recognition of participatory power within the household and community as a key dimension of empowerment.

Concerning **social status**, 68 respondents (42.5%) believed that improved social status contributes to women's independence, whereas a larger proportion, 92 respondents (57.5%), did not perceive it as a primary factor. This may indicate that respondents view economic and decision-making factors as more immediate and practical indicators of empowerment than social recognition alone.

Finally, in relation to **financial independence**, 106 respondents (66.2%) agreed that financial autonomy strengthens women's independence, while 54 respondents (33.8 %) disagreed. This further emphasizes the importance placed on economic self-reliance.

**Table – 9**
Problems faced by women wage seekers during Participation in MGNREGS.

| Particulars | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Delay Payment | | |
| Yes | 18 | 11.2 |
| No | 142 | 88.8 |
| **Total** | **160** | **100** |
| Men and Women Discrimination | | |
| Yes | 2 | 1.2 |
| No | 158 | 98.8 |
| **Total** | **160** | **100** |
| Worksite facilities are Available? | | |
| Yes | 14 | 8.8 |
| No | 146 | 91.2 |
| **Total** | **160** | **100** |

**Source:** Field survey

Table – 9 presents the various problems faced by women wage seekers during their participation in MGNREGS.

With regard to **delay in payment**, 18 respondents (11.2%) reported experiencing delayed wage payments, while a majority of 142 respondents (88.8%) stated that they did not face delays. Although the majority did not report payment delays, the presence of delayed payments for a section of respondents indicates administrative or procedural gaps that may affect livelihood security.

In terms of **men and women discrimination**, only 2 respondents (1.2%) reported experiencing gender discrimination, whereas an overwhelming 158 respondents (98.8%) stated that they did not face such discrimination. This suggests that the principle of gender equality, particularly equal wages for equal work under MGNREGS, is largely maintained at the field level.

Regarding the availability of **worksite facilities**, such as drinking water, shade, first aid, and childcare facilities, only 14 respondents (8.8%) reported that facilities were available, while a significant majority of 146 respondents (91.2%) stated that such facilities were not available. This indicates a serious deficiency in basic worksite infrastructure, which directly affects the comfort, safety, and well-being of women workers.

### 3. Conclusion and Suggestions

The study analyzed the impact of MGNREGS on the socio-economic empowerment of women in Prakasam District, Andhra Pradesh. It found that the scheme serves as an important livelihood support system for rural women, particularly those from socially and economically marginalized communities. Most beneficiaries are middle-aged women with low educational levels and strong dependence on wage labor, indicating that the program effectively reaches its target groups.

Participation in MGNREGS has positively influenced women's empowerment by increasing employment opportunities, financial independence, and decision-making power within households. Many women now take part in family decisions either independently or jointly with their husbands, reflecting improved confidence and bargaining power.

However, certain implementation issues remain, especially the lack of adequate worksite facilities such as drinking water, shade, and childcare. While wage discrimination and payment delays are minimal, improving infrastructure and ensuring better implementation are necessary to maximize the scheme's impact.

Overall, MGNREGS has made a significant contribution to improving women's socio-economic status, but its transformative potential requires stronger institutional support and gender-sensitive measures.

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