

SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

SOCIAL WORK PERSPECTIVE



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Social Problems in Contemporary India: Social Work Perspective

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Community Development and Social Security through MGNREGA: An Evidence from India

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Introduction

In the last decade of the twentieth century, social security system was challenged across the globe. It is a one of the most debatable issue in term of the expenses on social security are hindered the pace of the development. Others argument to deficiencies in the level of protection and the scope of coverage, and argue that in times of increased unemployment and other forms of labour insecurity, social security is more needed than ever (ILO, 2001). In the light of social security, the government of India launched a scheme for the rural households and guaranteeing hundred days of the unskilled manual work.

Community Development

Over past decades, the academicians and community development practitioners have discover various disputed values, objectives and principles in demanding to define the term of community development. There are harmony in scholars' view that community development has diverse meanings, theoretical base, and practical applicability. The concept is not consistent and unified but characterizes a range of meanings which embrace many shades of community development that are not inevitably well-suited but reproduce fussy political and social rehearsal in the circumstance in which they take place (Sihlongonyane, 2009, p. 136).

Kenny (1999) points out that by the end of twentieth century, community development has been recognised as a field by acting as a catalyst to the 'issues and problems of mankind and society'. This indicates that communities became empowered, started to identify their own needs and problems and their collective actions made possible to mutually take control over their own lives.

Kenny (1999) claims that the meaning of community development has a broad scope and varying theoretical base. Nowadays, the focus is on citizen

needs, human rights and people's choices and opportunities, the emergence of community based organisations to offer resources that can be utilised by community to counter with their own problems in their own manner.

Community development has many varying definitions. Unlike mathematics or physics where terms are scientifically derived and rigorously defined, community development has evolved with many different connotations (Phillips & Pittman, 2009).

Community development is often viewed as a normative science, advocating public participation and civic engagement. By normative science, we mean that it is not objective and value-free but is shaped by value and norms. It also may mean that community development is more of an 'act' than a 'science'. There is no conceptual map for how to work with all communalities (Robinson & Green, 2011).

Community development has evolved into a recognized discipline drawing from a wide variety of academic fields including sociology, economics, political science, planning, geography, and many others (Phillips & Pittman, 2009).

Community development has evolved to include a much broader focus than just poverty. Affordable housing, job training, and social services continue to be the 'meat and potatoes' of community development programmes. Community development, however, has expanded to include local issues such as education, healthcare, and the environment. Thus, community development is a field composed of many disciplines. For example, individuals from any of the following disciplines may become involved in community development--anthropology, business, education, economics, geography, organisational behaviour, sociology, or social work. The common thread that runs through various discipline and issues is the continuing importance of place and the value (necessity) of public participation in decisions that affect local people (Robinson & Green, 2011).

The community development literature is filled with contradictory notions about the field. The literature is often divided among those who promote 'development-in-the-community' and those who advocate 'development-of-the-community' (Shaffer & Summers, 1989). This distinction is often characterised as process versus outcomes (Robinson & Green, 2011).

The key concept of community development can be expressed through many definitions as discussed below:

Dunham (1968, p. 142) classifies Community Development as: '*organising people's efforts toward improving conditions of community life and the capacity for community integration and self-direction*'. This definition comprises four basic elements: a designed program, the idea of self-help, technical assistance through the external agents as well as local agents in terms of various expertises for the support of the community.

'For community development to occur, people in a community must believe working together can make a difference and organise to address their shared needs collectively' (Flora, Flora, Spear, & Swanson, 1992). It indicates that community development is a procedure that enables community to work as a group to achieve shared goals through their collective effort.

Community development is *'a group of people in a community reaching a decision to initiate a social action process to change their economic, social, cultural and environmental situation'* (Christenson, Fendley, & Robinson, 1989). This definition suggests that community development is (a) a process; (b) to create change in life cycle in terms of social, economical, cultural and environmental; (c) with the help of formal or informal group within community; (d) through the instrument of social action.

Community development is *'a process that increases choices. It creates an environment where people can exercise their full potential to lead productive, creative lives'* (Shaffer, 1990). It consists of basic fundamentals: community development as a process, the idea of community capacity, creation of opportunities, and upliftment of their living standard.

Community development can be defined as *'a process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with its active participation and the fullest possible reliance upon the community's initiatives'* (United Nations, 1955 cited in Dayal, 1965, p. 7).

Thus, we can say that, community development is a planned process, the idea of social change, the encouragement of people participation, and motivation for self-reliance.

Social Security

Social security is the protection that a society provides to individuals and households to ensure access to health care and to guarantee income security, particularly in cases of old age, unemployment, sickness, invalidity, work injury, maternity or loss of a breadwinner (ILO, 2001).

In the last decade of the twentieth century, social security system was challenged across the globe. It is a one of the most debatable issue in term of the expenses on social security are hindered the pace of the development. Others argument to deficiencies in the level of protection and the scope of coverage, and argue that in times of increased unemployment and other forms of labour insecurity, social security is more needed than ever.

In many parts of the world, in the closing years of the twentieth century, social security systems have been under challenge. Some consider that the systems are too expensive, and that they harm the process of economic growth and development. Others argument to deficiencies in the level of protection and the scope of coverage, and argue that in times of increased unemployment

and other forms of labour insecurity, social security is more needed than ever. Particularly in the industrialized countries (including the transition economies of Central and Eastern Europe), social security systems must respond to new demographic challenges, such as ageing and changing family structures, with important implications for the financing of social protection. In some countries, there is dissatisfaction with the administration of social security, and calls for reform involve a review of the role of the State, the responsibilities of the social partners and the desirability of greater participation of the private sector. One of the key global problems facing social security today is the fact that more than half of the world's population (workers and their dependants) is excluded from any type of social security protection. They are covered neither by a contribution-based social insurance scheme nor by tax-financed social benefits, while a significant additional proportion are covered for only a few contingencies (ILO, 2001).

As per ILO (2001) estimate, in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, statutory social security personal coverage is estimated at 5 to 10 per cent of the working population and in some cases is decreasing. In Latin America, coverage lies roughly between 10 and 80 per cent, and is mainly stagnating. In South-East and East Asia, coverage can vary between 10 and almost 100 per cent, and in many cases was until recently increasing. In most industrialized countries, coverage is close to 100 per cent, although in a number of these countries, especially those in transition, compliance rates have fallen in recent years.

MGNREGA

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is a flagship legislation of the country that endeavours to uplift the lives of the poorest section of society living in rural areas with social and economic vulnerability. The Act seeks at augmenting livelihood security of rural households of the country by providing minimum 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every rural household whose adult members aged above 18 years voluntarily seek to do unskilled manual work. The MGNREGA has emerged as world's largest employment programme and is very distinct from other wage employment programmes, in its size, right-based design and demand driven approach. MGNREGA has become dominant tool for endorsing inclusive growth through guaranteeing on social safeguard, livelihood security and democratic empowerment in rural India (Shah, 2013; MoRD, 2008).

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) Bill 2004 was presented in the parliament on December 21, 2004. The Act was notified on September 7, 2005 and came into force on February 2, 2006. In 2009, the Act was renamed as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee

Act. The implementation process was started in 2006 in a phased manner (Shah, 2013; MoRD, 2008).

Initially, the Act was implemented in 200 most backward districts of the country in 2006-07. Later on, another 130 districts were covered in 2007-08. And from April 2008 onwards, 615 rural districts of the country had been covered under the Act. Overall, the Act has been implemented in three phases to cover all rural districts of the country.

In the first phase, out of 200 districts, 44 percent of districts were from eastern region, whereas western region accounted for 27 percent, followed by northern region (17 percent) and southern region (13 percent).

In the *first phase*, 58 percent of covered districts were from the poorest states of the country- Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Uttarakhand – in which 61 percent of total rural poor of the country live.

In the *second phase*, 40 percent of total covered districts were from the eastern region. While, the western region accounted for 25 percent of the total covered districts, followed by northern with 21 percent and southern region with 14 percent.

In the *last phase*, the northern region were dominated with 34 percent and western region with 25 percent. Whereas, eastern and southern regions accounted for the remaining 20 percent and 18 per cent respectively (NCAER-PIF, 2009).

The mandate of the Act is to provide 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every rural household whose adult members (above 18 years) voluntarily seek to do unskilled manual work (Shah, 2013; MoRD, 2008).

The major objectives of the programme are- (a) ensuring social protection for the most vulnerable people living in rural India through providing employment opportunities; (b) ensuring livelihood security for the poor through creation of durable assets, improved water security, soil conservation and higher land productivity; (c) strengthening drought-proofing and flood management in rural India; (d) aiding in the empowerment of the marginalised communities, especially women, Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), through the processes of a rights-based legislation; (e) strengthening decentralised, participatory planning through convergence of various anti-poverty and livelihoods initiatives; (f) deepening democracy at the grass-roots by strengthening the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs); and (g) effecting greater transparency and accountability in governance (Shah, 2013; MoRD, 2008).

Review of Literature

Ghosh (2008) stated that MGNREGA will prove to be an extremely cost-effective way of increasing employment directly and indirectly, reviving the rural economy, providing basic consumption stability to poor households and improving the bargaining power of rural workers.

Dutta, Murgai, Ravallion, & Dominique (2012) pointed out that MGNREGA has many prospects to impact poverty by offering additional work opportunities and income to the poorest population of the rural areas.

Ghosh (2009) and Dheeraja & Rao (2010) revealed that the mandatory provision of wage payment through bank and post office has guaranteed that a large number of women were accessed to economic institution from which they had been largely devoid of.

MGNREGA has been an important and stable source of earning especially for female-headed households. It was reported in 25 surveys across six States that, 82 percent of the widows among sample respondents stated MGNREGA as a very vital source of earnings. On the other hand, 67 percent of them reported that it had helped them to avoid hunger and 46 percent reported for preventing illness (Khera & Nayak, 2009; National Federation for Indian Women (NFIW), 2008; Dreze & Khera, 2011).

Another study also suggested that there was a significant increase in food security for the households engaged in MGNREGA, as households' readiness for food extended from six months to nine months (IIFM, IRMA & ISSR, 2012).

Engler & Ravi (2012) found that the programme has impacted the health outcomes as 12 percent reduction in the occurrence of reported depression and improvements in mental health indicators. On the contrast, health expenditure per household had been on decline by Rupees 8. In their longitudinal study in Medak in Andhra Pradesh, they found that due to MGNREGA, number of giving up meals had reduced significantly among those who worked under MGNREGA.

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Methodology

Considerable evidences in the form of quantitative as well as qualitative data indicate the positive effects of MGNREGA on improving the living standard of the rural people. This provides a strong foundation for new research and analysis to consolidate the picture. This study endeavours to assess the effects of the concerned programme on the social security issues of the community in the context of community development outcomes. The design of the present study is descriptive in nature and universe of the study is the West Champaran district. The study adopted a multi-stage sampling design and sample size is 300.

Discussion

The study conducted in the district West Champaran based upon 300 households. In this study, the various measures of the community development and social security was cross examine and it was found that the MGNREGA have a grass-root impact on the lives of the rural people. The study mainly focuses on the idea of community capacity, creation of opportunities, the encouragement of people participation, motivation for self-reliance and upliftment of their living standard through the social security intervention of the government.

The study depict that out of the total respondents, 46.7 percent, 35.0 percent and 18.3 percent reported for 'moderately increased', 'significantly increased' and 'no change' respectively in their social participation. On gender level, 45.1 percent of the female respondents felt that the level of social participation 'significantly increased' as compared to their male counterparts (31.9 percent). Only 20.1 percent and 12.7 percent of the male and female respondents respectively said that there was 'no change' in their social participation after the implementation of MGNREGA. Therefore, it is evident that the level of social participation has remarkably increased after the implementation of MGNREGA.

The data elicit that out of the total respondents, majority (50.0 percent) viewed that their self confidence was 'significantly increased' after implementation of MGNREGA. 31.7 percent and 18.3 percent of the total respondents reported for 'moderately increased' and 'no change' respectively. Out of the total male respondents, 48.9 percent responded that their level of self confidence was 'significantly increased', 31.4 percent opted for 'moderately increased' and only 19.7 percent said that there was 'no change' in their self-confidence. In the context of female respondents, 53.5 percent, 32.4 percent and 14.1 percent reported for 'significantly increased', 'moderately increased' and 'no change' respectively. It was found that majority of the respondents have improved their self-confidence after the implementation of MGNREGA.

The data show that out of the total respondents 38.3 percent, 45.0 percent and 16.7 percent reflected for 'significantly increased', 'moderately increased' and 'no change' respectively in making them self-reliant. Out of the total male respondents, 46.7 percent reported for 'moderately increased', 36.2 percent for 'significantly increased' and 17.0 percent for 'no change'. Further, it was observed that out of the total female respondents, the frequency of response was 45.1 percent for 'significantly increased', 39.4 percent for 'moderately increased' and 15.5 percent for 'no change'. Overall, it can be ruled out that majority of the respondents felt that MGNREGA played an important role on making them feel self-reliant.

Conclusion

The MGNREGA is one the largest employment guaranteeing and skill-building programmes launched in India in pursuit of poverty alleviation. The programme has been acknowledged as a milestone for poverty eradication in accordance with United Nations' Millennium Development Goal-1 (MDG-1). The programme is also significant in its overarching role for building people's capacity to foster social and economic capital, to bring desired change in the community. Millions of women and men are learning technical, administrative and social skills as Gram Rozgar Sevaks, Programme Officers, Worksite Mates, Data Entry Operators and Social Auditors under the programme. Therefore, MGNREGA is playing an important role in bringing change to the people's lives and achieving community development goals and ensuring social security.

MGNREGA, on one hand, is helping the deprived by guaranteed employment while on other hand, curtailing victimhood by falling prey to the private employers who may exploit them as cheap and submissive labour. In words of Jean Dreze (2015), '*few social programmes in India are more resented by the corporate sector than the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). This is easy to understand, considering that one of the primary aims of the MGNREGA is to empower workers and reduce their dependence on private employers. Naturally, employers see this as a threat to the availability of cheap and docile labour*'.

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