



MNREGA AND SOCIAL SECURITY IN BIHAR: A STUDY OF BAHADURPUR BLOCK IN DARBHANGA DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT :

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) is one of India's most significant rural development and social security programmes. Introduced in 2005, the scheme guarantees 100 days of wage employment annually to rural households willing to undertake unskilled manual work. In Bihar, where poverty, unemployment, seasonal migration, and agrarian distress are common, MNREGA plays a crucial role in strengthening rural livelihoods and promoting social security. The present study examines the role and effectiveness of MNREGA in Bahadurpur Block of Darbhanga district in Bihar.

The study analyses the socio-economic conditions of the area, the implementation of MNREGA, and its contribution toward employment generation, income enhancement, and social inclusion. Secondary data from Census reports, district records, government publications, and academic studies have been used for the analysis. The findings reveal that MNREGA has positively influenced the rural poor by creating temporary employment opportunities, reducing distress migration, improving purchasing power, and enhancing community assets. However, issues such as delayed wage payments, corruption, inadequate awareness, and limited work opportunities continue to affect the scheme's effectiveness.

The study concludes that MNREGA has emerged as an important social security mechanism in Bihar, particularly in vulnerable rural regions like Bahadurpur Block. Strengthening transparency, timely payment systems, local participation, and administrative efficiency can improve the programme's impact on rural livelihoods and sustainable development.

Keywords: MNREGA, Social Security, Rural Employment, Bihar, Poverty Alleviation, Rural Development.

INTRODUCTION:

Social security is an essential component of a welfare state and refers to the protection provided by society

and the government against economic and social distress arising from unemployment, poverty, illness, disability, and old age (World Bank, 2011). In developing countries like India, where a large

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proportion of the population depends on agriculture and informal labour, social security programmes play a vital role in ensuring livelihood security and reducing rural poverty (Bhalla, 2011).

Rural India has historically faced problems such as unemployment, underemployment, seasonal migration, low wages, landlessness, and inadequate infrastructure. These challenges are more severe in economically backward states like Bihar, where agriculture remains the primary source of livelihood for the majority of the population (Planning Commission of India, 2013). Frequent floods, low industrial development, and high population density further aggravate rural distress in Bihar. As a result, a significant number of rural households migrate seasonally to other states in search of employment opportunities (Kumar & Sinha, 2018).

To address rural unemployment and strengthen livelihood security, the Government of India enacted the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) in 2005. The Act came into force in February 2006 and is considered one of the largest rights-based employment programmes in the world (Dreze & Khera, 2017). The scheme guarantees at least 100 days of wage employment annually to every rural household whose adult members are willing to undertake unskilled manual work (Government of India, 2023). Unlike previous poverty alleviation programmes, MNREGA is demand-driven and legally guarantees employment, making it a significant instrument of social security and rural development.

The primary objectives of MNREGA are to enhance livelihood security in rural areas, create durable community assets, strengthen decentralized governance and promote social inclusion (Hirway, 2006). The programme also aims to empower marginalized sections of society, particularly Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), women and landless labourers. Women's participation has been one of the notable achievements of MNREGA, as the Act mandates equal wages for men and women and encourages female participation in rural employment (Singh & Nair, 2015). Several studies have highlighted the positive impact of MNREGA on rural employment and poverty reduction. According to Ambasta, Vijay Shankar, and Shah (2008), the programme has contributed significantly to rural infrastructure development through activities such as road construction, water conservation, irrigation facilities, and land development. These assets not only generate employment but also improve agricultural productivity and long-term rural sustainability.

In Bihar, MNREGA has special significance because of the state's socio-economic conditions. Bihar remains one of the poorest states in India with high levels of rural poverty and unemployment (Mishra & Suresh, 2014). The majority of rural households are either landless or possess very small agricultural holdings. In such circumstances, MNREGA serves as a major source of supplementary income and social protection. Studies indicate that the programme

has helped reduce distress migration and provided wage security to poor households during agricultural lean seasons (Yadav & Pandey, 2017). Darbhanga district, situated in the Mithila region of Bihar, is predominantly rural and agriculture-based. The district frequently experiences floods and waterlogging due to its geographical location in the Kosi-Ganga floodplain region. These natural conditions adversely affect agricultural productivity and employment opportunities. Bahadurpur Block, one of the important administrative blocks of Darbhanga district, reflects many of the socio-economic challenges common to rural Bihar, including poverty, unemployment, low literacy, and migration.

According to Census 2011 data, Bahadurpur Block has a predominantly rural population with a significant proportion belonging to Scheduled Castes and economically weaker sections. The literacy rate in the block is lower than the national average, and a large number of people depend on agricultural labour for survival (Census of India, 2011). In this context, MNREGA acts as an important social security mechanism by providing wage employment, enhancing rural income, and supporting vulnerable households. Despite its achievements, the implementation of MNREGA faces several challenges in Bihar, including delayed wage payments, corruption, inadequate awareness, and weak administrative monitoring (Jha et al., 2009). Therefore, it becomes important to examine the

effectiveness of MNREGA at the local level to understand its contribution to social security and rural development.

The present study focuses on Bahadurpur Block in Darbhanga district and attempts to analyse the role of MNREGA in providing social security to rural households. The study also examines the socio-economic impact of the programme and identifies the major challenges affecting its implementation in the study area.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Several scholars and researchers have studied the impact of MNREGA on rural employment and social security in India. Dreze and Khera (2017) observed that MNREGA strengthened rural livelihoods by providing wage employment and reducing distress migration. They argued that the programme acts as a social safety net during economic crises and agricultural off-seasons. Ambasta, Vijay Shankar, and Shah (2008) highlighted that MNREGA improved rural infrastructure through the construction of roads, ponds, irrigation canals, and water conservation projects. They emphasized the importance of local participation and decentralization in successful implementation.

Kumar and Sinha (2018) examined MNREGA implementation in Bihar and found that the programme contributed significantly to income generation among rural labourers. However, issues

such as corruption, delayed wage payments, and weak monitoring reduced its effectiveness. Chakraborty (2019) pointed out that women's participation in MNREGA enhanced their economic independence and social status. The scheme provided equal wages and improved decision-making power among rural women.

Studies conducted in Bihar indicate that MNREGA has reduced seasonal migration in several districts. However, inadequate awareness, irregular work availability, and poor administrative capacity continue to remain challenges. Research on Darbhanga district suggests that the region suffers from recurrent floods, agricultural dependency, and unemployment. Social security programmes such as MNREGA therefore play a vital role in maintaining livelihood security and reducing poverty. Overall, existing literature shows that MNREGA has positively contributed to social security, but effective implementation remains necessary for achieving sustainable rural development.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY :

1. To examine the role of MNREGA in providing social security in Bahadurpur Block of Darbhanga district.
2. To analyse the socio-economic impact of MNREGA on rural households in the study area.
3. To identify the major challenges in the implementation of MNREGA in Bihar.

Study Area: Bahadurpur Block in Darbhanga District :

Bahadurpur Block is located in Darbhanga district in the northern part of Bihar. The block falls under the Darbhanga Sadar subdivision and consists of 23 panchayats and around 176 villages. ([Darbhanga District Official Website](#))

The region is part of the fertile Gangetic plains and depends mainly on agriculture. Paddy, wheat, maize, and pulses are the major crops cultivated in the area. Despite fertile land, the block experiences frequent floods and waterlogging, which negatively affect agricultural productivity and employment.

According to Census 2011 data, Bahadurpur Block has a population of about 261,805. Nearly 98.3% of the population lives in rural areas. Scheduled Castes constitute around 21.9% of the population. The literacy rate is approximately 57.86%, which is lower than the national average. (www.censusindia.co.in)

The block has a large number of landless labourers and marginal farmers. Seasonal migration to urban centres and other states is common due to lack of local employment opportunities. MNREGA therefore plays a crucial role in supporting rural livelihoods and ensuring income security.

Research Methodology

The present study is based primarily on secondary data. Information has been collected from:

- Census of India Reports

- Government publications
- Ministry of Rural Development reports
- Research articles and journals
- District administration records
- Online databases and reports

Descriptive and analytical methods have been used to interpret the data and evaluate the impact of MNREGA on social security in Bahadurpur Block.

Role of MNREGA in Social Security :

MNREGA has emerged as one of the most important rural employment schemes in India. In Bihar, where poverty and unemployment are widespread, the programme provides economic and social protection to vulnerable households.

Employment Generation :

The scheme provides wage employment to rural labourers during agricultural off-seasons. This reduces dependency on uncertain agricultural income and provides minimum livelihood support. In Bahadurpur Block, many labourers depend on MNREGA work such as road construction, pond digging, canal cleaning, and plantation activities. The programme has helped poor households earn wages without migrating to distant cities.

Reduction in Poverty:

MNREGA contributes to poverty reduction by increasing household income. Wage employment improves purchasing power and enables families to

spend more on food, education, healthcare, and housing. For marginalized groups such as Scheduled Castes and women, MNREGA provides an opportunity to access regular income and social dignity.

Women Empowerment :

Women's participation in MNREGA has increased significantly in Bihar. Equal wage provisions encourage female labour participation. Women workers gain economic independence and contribute to household decision-making.

In Bahadurpur Block, women participate in activities like soil work, plantation, and water conservation projects. Their involvement enhances social inclusion and gender equality.

Reduction in Migration:

Migration is a common phenomenon in Bihar due to unemployment and low wages. MNREGA reduces distress migration by creating local employment opportunities.

Although migration has not completely stopped, many households in Bahadurpur now depend partly on MNREGA wages during difficult agricultural seasons.

Creation of Rural Assets :

The programme contributes to rural infrastructure development through roads, ponds, irrigation channels, and water conservation projects. These

assets improve agricultural productivity and strengthen rural development.

Table: Socio-Economic Indicators of Bahadurpur Block

Indicators	Data
Total Population	261,805
Rural Population	98.3%
Literacy Rate	57.86%
Scheduled Caste Population	21.9%
Main Workers	51,802
Agricultural Labourers	20,592
Non-Working Population	183,649
Number of Panchayats	23
Number of Villages	176

Source: Census Data and District Records.

Analysis of the Data :

The data reveal that Bahadurpur Block is predominantly rural and economically dependent on agriculture. The literacy rate is relatively low, indicating limited employment opportunities outside agriculture. A large number of people are agricultural labourers, reflecting rural poverty and dependence on seasonal work. The high non-working population also indicates unemployment and underemployment in the region. The substantial Scheduled Caste population highlights the importance of inclusive social security programmes like MNREGA. Since vulnerable groups often lack stable employment and land ownership, MNREGA serves as a major support mechanism.

The presence of 176 villages and 23 panchayats indicates the administrative complexity of implementing rural employment programmes effectively. Proper monitoring and decentralized planning are essential for successful implementation.

Challenges in Implementation of MNREGA:

Despite its achievements, MNREGA faces several challenges in Bihar.

Delayed Wage Payments:

One of the major problems is delay in wage payments. Workers often wait for weeks or months to receive wages, which reduces trust in the programme.

Corruption and Leakages:

Cases of fake job cards, manipulation of attendance records, and misuse of funds have been reported in several regions. Corruption weakens the effectiveness of social security programmes.

Lack of Awareness :

Many rural labourers are unaware of their rights under MNREGA, including unemployment allowance and grievance redressal mechanisms.

Insufficient Work Availability :

Although the scheme guarantees 100 days of work, many households receive much fewer days of

employment due to administrative inefficiency and limited projects.

Administrative Weakness :

Shortage of staff, weak monitoring systems, and lack of transparency affect implementation quality. In some areas, political interference also influences project selection and beneficiary identification.

Discussion :

MNREGA has become an important instrument of social security in Bihar. In regions like Bahadurpur Block, where agriculture is uncertain and employment opportunities are limited, the scheme provides essential livelihood support.

The programme has contributed positively to employment generation, poverty reduction, women empowerment, and rural infrastructure development. It has also reduced distress migration to some extent.

However, the effectiveness of MNREGA depends largely on administrative efficiency and transparency. Delayed wage payments and corruption reduce worker participation and public confidence. Awareness campaigns and social audits are necessary to ensure accountability.

The socio-economic condition of Bahadurpur Block demonstrates the need for strong rural employment programmes. Since a large section of the population belongs to marginalized communities, social security measures remain crucial for inclusive development.

MNREGA should not be viewed only as an employment programme but also as a broader social protection mechanism that enhances human dignity and rural resilience.

Conclusion :

MNREGA has played a significant role in strengthening social security in Bihar, particularly in rural areas such as Bahadurpur Block of Darbhanga district. The programme has provided employment opportunities, increased household income, supported women participation, and reduced seasonal migration.

The study shows that MNREGA contributes positively to rural livelihoods and acts as a safety net for vulnerable populations. The creation of rural assets under the scheme also supports long-term development.

However, several challenges continue to limit the effectiveness of the programme. Delayed payments, corruption, lack of awareness, and inadequate implementation reduce the overall impact of MNREGA.

For improving the effectiveness of MNREGA in Bihar, the following measures are recommended:

- Timely payment of wages
- Strengthening social audits
- Increasing awareness among workers

- Better transparency and monitoring
- Expansion of employment opportunities
- Greater participation of local communities

If implemented effectively, MNREGA can continue to serve as a powerful instrument of social security and sustainable rural development in Bihar.

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