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RIGHT TO WORK AND HOW IT IS BEING EXECUTED
IN WEST BENGAL : A CASE STUDY



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ABSTRACT

Rural development and poverty eradication have emerged at the top most of the agenda of the national policies in India since the planning era began. But the policies and the strategies of alleviating poverty did not succeed to reach the goals. Most of these programmes massively suffered from targeting errors and leakage. Therefore, the absolute numbers of the impoverished has remained almost same throughout the decades of independence in spite of various efforts made by the government..Many research studies have pointed out the power relations, class difference, economic status, gender issues, social reputation and political

adherence as the local factors behind poor coverage and improper execution of these programmes by the local institutions particularly panchayats. Therefore, the 11th plan's main concern was to reduce poverty by including mass in the growth process and by helping them to reap the benefits of growth disproportionately for them. From the nineties onwards, Government has realized that to reduce poverty, rural employment has to be generated in a sustainable manner. A participatory planning comprising the local people in every stage can result in sustainable target oriented employment generation programme. 73 rd constitutional amendment (1993), enactment of Right to Information (2004) and Right to work (2005) are the efforts of the government to involve the local people in the welfare programmes through structural and institutional transformation. The acknowledgment to the demand of the mass for participation has resulted in implementation of MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) and the schemes to guarantee employment as MGREGS (Mahatma Gandhi National rural employment Guarantee scheme). Against this background, the recent research study has tried to factors out the socio-economic and political factors playing the key role in selection of beneficiaries and generation of mandays under NREGS , recently known as MGNREGS in West Bengal.

KEYWORDS : *MGNERS, Poverty, Political, Panchayats.*

INTRODUCTION

The idea of creating employment by the government to guarantee employment as an employer

of last resort (ELR) has been used by many governments in different forms at different point of time. During last few decades, government intervention in the labour market as an employer of the last resort has gained much popularity in the developing countries. Examples of Government intervention in guaranteeing employment in recent era can be found in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Philippines, Egypt, Botswana, Kenya and Chile are the (Subbarao, 1997; Lipton, 1996).

Adequate days of employment and income generation are the twin objectives of an employment guarantee programme, which functions as a safety net and aims at eradicating poverty. In India, Government at several times has gone for wage employment programmes as an integral part of poverty eradication because the poorest are not able to avail sufficient days of employment to guarantee their bare subsistence. Lack of enough employment opportunities and that also at a fair remuneration is the main cause behind severe poverty in the country. Again, it is claimed that the factor behind persistent Indian poverty is the deep-rootedness of poverty in rural areas where three-quarters of the poor live (Indian Planning Commission, 2008). The main reason for vast poverty in rural areas is the persistent dependence on agriculture for livelihood. Though the share of agriculture in employment is still 53 % in 2009-10, the share of the sector in economic output has reduced to only 14 % in 2011-12 (12th Planning Commission Report). This dismal scenario signifies the bleak truth like low productivity, poor remuneration and negative employment elasticity of the sector. And to generate rural employment for a larger section of the growing labour force, non-agricultural employment has to be accelerated at a much higher pace. India has experienced decades of employment generation programmes. From the sixth five year plan, India tried to execute the employment generation programmes in rural sector through panchayats. The government launched various wage employment programmes at various points of time. In many instances, execution of the programmes through inefficient elected local representatives resulted in massive corruption and huge inefficiency in service delivery.

But the state gave a new impetus to rural development through 73rd constitutional amendment in 1993. Panchayats were rewarded with a constitutional status below the state legislature. The government took the initiative to devolve adequate funds, functions and functionaries to authorize the panchayats as self-government institutions in managing rural development. Therefore, it was all set to entrust the panchayats with the responsibility to execute the welfare programmes. Again the Government declared for an inclusive growth during the 11th Plan for a gainful involvement of the poor. Since independence, the state tried to solve the problems of unemployment and poverty but never reached its goals. Unemployment scenario in India especially in the rural areas became severe form after the 90s. It was calculated that during the 11th Plan period India has to provide around 1000 lakhs employment, most of them in rural areas. According to NSSO's 61st round of nationwide survey rural unemployment grew from 4.6 % in 80s to 9.1 % in 2004-2005. Against this background, guaranteeing employment for definite mandays at a fair remuneration through people's participation and Panchayat's involvement in rural areas was an urgent need.

Since Sixth Five Year Plan, India has experienced decades of employment generation programmes to achieve its unemployment goals but it never happened in true sense (Rao, 2005; Hirway, 2006). Therefore, it is required that these wage employment programmes should be covered with increased public investment, institutional reforms towards more decentralization and devolution at the grassroot. Again, institutional mechanism should be developed to ensure wide participation of the mass at the community level to execute the programme in a transparent and efficient way (Vaidyanathan, 2005). Through the past experience, the Government also realized that to reduce poverty, rural employment has to be generated in a sustainable manner as the previous wage

employment programmes have failed to attain the desired results. On the other hand, from the late 90s the country has witnessed the commoners organizing themselves in demand for every information about the government proceedings, participation in the planning process, and security of employment as basic rights. As a definite outcome, 73rd constitutional amendment (1993), enactment of Right to Information (2004) and Right to Work (2005) are the efforts of the government to involve local people in the welfare programmes through structural and institutional transformation. Acknowledgment to the demand of the mass for active participation in the governing process and the right to get employed have resulted in implementation of NREGA (National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) through panchayats, a complete demand based programme, which is now known as MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act).

The present empirical study is a village level study to find out the factors playing key roles in selecting beneficiaries and generating mandays under NREGS (National Rural Employment Scheme). While making an evaluation study of the impact of different socio – economic and political factors on man days generation for the beneficiaries under the scheme, special emphasis is given on panchayat's involvement, and democratic practice. To make an intensive idea about the factors playing determining role behind selection of beneficiaries and flow of benefit to them, we have made a contradictory village level study of two districts, Purulia and North 24 Parganas.

The whole study is divided in three sections. Section i illustrates about National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, and, therefore, NREGS. Section ii gives a brief literature survey about the factors influencing execution of the welfare programmes, especially NREGS. In Section iii secondary data about the progress of NREGS in different states of India are given to show the place of West Bengal regarding execution of NREGS. Progress of NREGS in different districts of West Bengal is also cited to make comparative analysis of the districts in implementing NREGS. Section iii discusses the objectives and methodology of the present study. The statistical analysis of the primary data collected from different blocks of the two districts is undertaken in section iv to find out the determinants of man days generation under NREGS.

Section i

Right to work or National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) was enacted on September 7, 2005 and the schemes under this act (NREGS) were initiated since 2006. From 2nd October, 2009, it was renamed as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Schemes (MGNREGS) after the name of Mahatma Gandhi. The newly promoted scheme marked a drastic shift from the previous wage employment programmes with its rights based approach that makes the Governmental apparatus legally accountable for providing employment to the job seekers on a priority basis. The Act aims at enhancing livelihood security of households in rural areas of the country by providing at least one hundred days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. Panchayats are bestowed solely with the implementation of the scheme.

The ideology behind NREGA is that the nation should guarantee employment to one who seeks employment at a stipulated wage rate. If the government fails to provide him / her with jobs within fifteen days, it would provide an unemployment grant. According to this act, the job seekers will be provided with job cards. They are guaranteed to get minimum 100 man days of employment. The act also has special provisions for women. The act provides demand based schemes so that the wage earners get jobs according to their demand. The whole lot of schemes will be planned, implemented and supervised by the village panchayats. Local plans will be formulated through mass participation at

the public forums (Gram Sabha) commenced by the panchayats. Beneficiaries of the welfare projects will be selected through open discussion in the Gram Sabhas by the consent of the majority. On the other hand, Gram Sabha is to endorse people's participation in acquiring information about development proceedings, financial accounts and raising their voices against exploitation. Thus social audit at a public forum is an indispensable component of micro planning solely oriented towards the local needs and demands.

NREGA is unique in every sense. It has marked a transformation of the previous wage employment generation with its right based approach. It has altered the status of the commoners from merely the beneficiaries to the stakeholders and the officials' position is reduced to only service providers. As the stakeholders, the mass can claim every explanation from the associated institutions and individuals regarding the programme. Panchayats are given the sheer responsibility of executing the programme. By this attempt NREGA has initiated to strengthen decentralization and enhance democratic practice. It has aimed in reducing the vulnerability of the marginalized literate or semi-literate section by constructing social assets through management of renewable natural resources in a sustainable manner. The other exclusivity of the scheme is organizing public audit for assessing the physical and financial progress of the programmes implemented under the scheme termed as social audit.

Section ii

Many researches in the recent decade have concentrated on the execution of NREGS, its fruitfulness and weakness as it has uniquely empowered citizens with the right to work and has much expectations among academics, policy makers, and the commoners. An empirical study discussing about impacts of NREGS concludes that a gradual progress in the lives of the beneficiaries continuously working under NREGS is seen in terms of socio economic indicators like dwelling house, drinking water, sanitation and asset possession (Sarkar, et al, 2011). A study undertaken in the three districts of Gujarat investigating have factored out the positive impacts of MGNREGA on gross income, food intake, consumption of different assets and debt position of the villagers (Thomas and Bhatia, 2012). NREGS is showing quite impressive results in terms of SC, ST coverage. Women coverage is also improving in the years. So as a self targeted programme, its evolution is quite impressive (Rao and Durgaprasad, 2008; Jha, Gaiha and Shankar, 2010; 2012; Shankar, Gaiha and Jha, 2011). Different studies focussed on different states showed that for the backward and resource-poor areas, MGNREGA is a good source of employment for the households predominantly dependent on agricultural and non-agricultural labour (Ahuja . et al , 2011; Thakur, 2011; Shankar, Gaiha and Jha, 2011). A study also detected that agricultural labourers and larger households exhibiting low living standards and acute poor have higher probability of working under NREGS making the self-targeting process quite successful. Studies report that demand for NREGS and job provision is positively related to poverty head count ratio (Shankar, Gaiha and Jha, 2011). Thus analyzing the impacts of the scheme, it seems the scheme is quite optimistic in terms of participation and targeting the most required. Other studies discussing the impacts of the programme on the lives of women participants have revealed a positive impact of the scheme on consumption of food and non food items, socio- economic empowerment, education status, and democratic awareness (Shankar, et.al, 2012; Pankaj and Tankha, 2010; Khera and Nayak, 2009).

Despite high poverty in rural West Bengal and low agricultural wage rate, West Bengal lags far behind in implementing the most expected NREGS. There is huge discrepancy between job card distribution and provision of jobs or person days generation under NREGS. West Bengal lags behind other states in person days generation per household. West Bengal is criticized for illogical distribution

of funds and siphoning of funds illegally. As a result, many districts which have huge scopes for successful implementation of NREGS could not implement the programme effectively because of fund shortage (De, 2009).

The case of West Bengal can be cited as a typical example of deconcentration and political participation. The experience of Panchayati Raj (local governance) in West Bengal is appreciated all over the world (Charvak, 2001). From 1978 onwards the pro-poor government stepped forward for decentralization through panchayats. Therefore, activeness and efficacy of the panchayats in implementing poverty alleviation programmes is an area of special interest and research work.

Section iii

Objectives of the current study can be listed as follows :

- ▲ To know about NREGA and its basic features
- ▲ To know about the progress of NREGS in West Bengal in comparison with other states.
- ▲ To know about people's participation in panchayat activities and the execution process of NREGS in two focused districts (North 24 Parganas and Purulia)
- ▲ To analyse the social, economic and political factors behind selection of beneficiaries and man days generation of the scheme.

METHODOLOGY AND ESTIMATION :

The present micro level study is based on village level primary data from the two districts of West Bengal. Primary survey is based on random sample survey of the participants at different NREGS work sites in different villages under eight Gram Panchayats in two districts. Two districts North 24 Parganas and Purulia are chosen purposively. Again two blocks in each district are chosen purposively. Gram Panchayats and the villages under the Gram Panchayats are chosen randomly for the empirical study. Total five hundred participants working under NREGS were interviewed at different work sites randomly to collect data on their socio-economic status of their households, educational level, days and forms of employment, involvement with panchayats, political and democratic participation. Simple statistical analysis is done to know about the factors influencing the key role in selection of beneficiaries under NREGS.

North 24 Parganas is an advanced urbanized state located close to Kolkata. On the contrary, Purulia is a poor block in terms of agricultural production, resources and geographical condition. According to the declaration of West Bengal Government, in 2004 there are two backward villages in North 24 Parganas and 298 backward villages in Purulia evaluated in terms of agricultural productivity, marginal workers and female literacy. This itself states the contradictory socio-economic condition of the two states. Moreover, during the study period Maoist trouble was severe in Purulia. Again villages were selected randomly from two Gram Panchayats under two blocks in each district. Blocks were selected purposively. Villages of North 24 Parganas are selected from Barrackpore 1 Block and Hingaljanj Block. Barrackpore is an urbanized block, geographically rich in terms of land quality, irrigation facilities and employment opportunities. On the other side, Hingaljanj is a remote block in Sunderbans. Employment opportunities other than agriculture and fishing are not found in the area. Due to lack of irrigation facilities, most of the land in this area is cultivated once. Two Gram Panchayats in each block are selected randomly. Primary data is collected from eight randomly selected villages from these four Gram Panchayats. As the blocks in Purulia are quite homogeneous in nature, a block from the Maoist troubled area and the other outside this area is selected for the present analysis. Four villages for the primary survey are chosen randomly under each Gram Panchayat. The blocks selected

purposively are Arsha and Hura. Arsha is a Maoist block and situated at the footsteps of Ayodhya Hills. But Hura , the other focused block is well connected with different parts of the district and comparatively advanced than Arsha.

Section iv

Average Performances of the states in the last five years (2007-2012) in respect of persondays generation, involvement of the rural households, women participation and hundred days coverage under NREGA are portrayed in table 1.

Table: 1 Performance of the most discussed states regarding implementation of NREGS through the years (2007-2012):

States	Yearly Average Percentage of Demand fulfilment (%)	Yearly Average Participation Rate (%)	Yearly Average Person Days per HH	Yearly Average of Persondays Generation (for Women) %)	Average Percentage of 100 days coverage
Andhra Pradesh	80.00	41.75	52	57.18	11.14
Arunachal Pradesh	65.01	41.16	32	28.19	12.34
Assam	96.67	57.50	32	27.60	7.26
Bihar	99.22	33.86	29	26.96	5.27
Gujarat	99.98	31.22	35	46.20	5.47
Karnataka	97.55	40.36	43	45.98	5.69
Kerala	93.90	45.57	35	84.43	10.66
Madhya Pradesh	99.81	43.88	54	43.58	14.57
Rajasthan	99.00	66.99	64	67.76	24.42
Tamil Nadu	100.00	65.50	49	80.08	14.09
Tripura	99.87	93.30	68	48.87	19.55
West Bengal	99.50	41.19	31	28.88	1.58
Chhattisgarh	99.90	65.95	51	46.15	9.05
Jharkhand	99.97	47.89	45	33.42	5.40
Manipur	99.84	100.01	64	42.73	18.17
Meghalaya	96.98	80.63	47	73.64	10.42
Mizoram	99.21	97.60	75	32.63	35.80
Nagaland	100.00	99.21	71	34.40	23.92
Odisha	98.47	25.91	39	37.51	5.50
India	99.15	45.36	48	46.49	11.56

Source: www.nrega.nic.in.

From the table it can be seen that performance of West Bengal regarding NREGS is not so

encouraging in comparison with other states in the study period. Though the state has performed quite well in fulfilling demand, there is a huge difference in the numbers of job cards provision and the numbers actually working under the scheme. Average working days generation under the scheme is only 31 which is quite below than the other well performing states. In respect of women participation also, the state is lagging behind other states. It has not managed to generate even 30 % of the total person days generation for women. The state has performed extremely poor in generating mandatory 100 days for the households. West Bengal shows relatively better result in terms of women participation, employment generation in 2012-13. The state shows a better result in involving Schedule caste population.

West Bengal shows a comparative steady position in associating the Scheduled Castes. But the tribals are neglected. Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu showed an enthusiastic role in involving women in NREGS. In Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Haryana, Tripura and Bihar the backward castes like Scheduled Castes and Scheduled tribes are participating to a large extent.

Table 2: Performance of NREGS in West Bengal in terms of participation of people and fulfillment of demand in the districts of West Bengal

Districts	Participation Rate (%)				% of Demand met			
	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
24 Parganas South	5.88	18.23	16.91	19.73	100	100	100	99.73
Bankura	13.00	39.31	54.42	48.98	100	100	100	99.77
Birbhum	9.78	36.78	68.23	65.31	100	100	100	99.83
DinajpurDakshin	10.70	20.98	28.53	14.80	100	100	100	99.23
Dinajpur Uttar	0.68	17.58	19.68	15.19	100	100	100	99.67
Jalpaiguri	0.00	40.91	56.98	42.19	100	100	98.97	99.24
Maldah	6.76	24.57	21.14	23.74	100	100	100	99.84
Murshidabad	4.17	37.82	54.16	25.69	100	98.73	99.82	99.55
Purulia	9.71	38.51	44.14	45.63	100	100	100	99.58
West Midnapore	17.91	43.35	59.92	33.92	100	100	99.58	99.51
24 Parganas (North)	15.56	34.79	50.94	42.16	100	100	100	99.94
Burdwan	27.30	37.50	46.25	65.50	100	100	100	99.77
Coochbehar	8.19	35.39	56.28	38.99	100	99.30	98.27	95.95
East Midnapore	22.80	36.30	43.93	61.21	100	100	100	99.17
Hooghly	1.79	36.39	66.49	27.64	100	100	99.95	98.78
Nadia	17.78	26.27	41.33	36.57	100	100	100	99.33
SiliguriMahakumaParisad	9.03	30.85	38.97	35.65	100	100	100	98.93
Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC)	0.00	53.08	67.17	63.25	0	94.13	99.37	99.99
Howrah	7.30	26.78	27.13	27.51	100	100.00	100	99.89
West Bengal	11.17	33.62	46.58	39.60	100	99.73	99.73	99.38

Note: Participation Rate : Percentage of people getting opportunity under NREGS Source: www.nrega.nic.in

Table 3: Physical Performance of NREGS in the districts of West Bengal in terms of 100 days completion and generation of days per household

Districts	% of HHs completed 100 days				Average Person Days per HH			
	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
24 Parganas South	0.11	0.50	0.40	1.88	19	29	20	26
Bankura	0.93	2.60	5.92	1.83	28	44	49	22
Birbhum	0.37	2.36	1.93	1.91	38	56	31	24
DinajpurDakshin	0.28	1.98	0.56	0.27	25	53	26	15
Dinajpur Uttar	1.37	1.34	0.40	0.54	24	34	24	16
Jalpaiguri	0.30	3.41	0.27	0.21	25	64	22	18
Maldah	0.11	1.20	1.02	1.16	17	40	24	22
Murshidabad	0.03	0.76	0.77	0.43	21	29	26	17
Purulia	2.43	6.12	4.60	0.34	31	64	46	17
West Midnapore	0.63	3.01	1.70	1.59	27	52	34	22
24 Parganas (North)	0.52	3.27	2.75	1.31	42	54	32	29
Burdwan	2.22	2.18	6.81	0.28	34	55	55	17
Coochbehar	0.01	0.12	0.08	0.08	15	32	14	12
East Midnapore	0.87	1.08	0.72	0.73	16	39	29	21
Hooghly	0.40	1.73	2.19	0.25	20	30	28	15
Nadia	0.11	1.63	0.61	0.38	30	47	21	18
SiliguriMahakumaParisad	0.69	0.05	0.20	0.14	23	18	17	15
Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC)	0	1.80	1.61	2.44	0	24	31	36
Howrah	0	0.22	0.39	0.38	9	15	18	17
West Bengal	0.76	2.07	2.10	0.83	26	45	31	20

Note:HH- Household , Source: www.nrega.nic.in

Table 4: Women Share at the District Level

District	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
Phase I				
24Pgs(S)	9.76	10.79	15.39	23.59
Bankura	35.58	43.21	37.98	39.78
Birbhum	24.71	37.01	31.17	23.93
D. Dinajpur	26.46	37.73	31.56	28.34
U. Dinajpur	36.69	42	33.62	31.01
Jalpaiguri	40.2	46.6	44.99	39.9
Maldah	20.45	31.81	30.42	28.87
Murshidabad	10.6	9.56	13.23	15.15
PaschimMedinipur	25.52	30.04	30.43	33.07
Purulia	37.05	41.08	38.93	43.04
Phase II				
24Pgs(N)	5.73	15.14	26.27	33.32
Burdwan	34.84	46.16	45.06	28.85
Coochbehar	20.75	24.43	23.93	23.4
Hoogly	26.41	31.46	34.02	33.97
Nadia	13.98	23.02	31.05	27.39
PurbaMedinipur	32.34	43.55	44.58	48.44
Phase III				
SiliguriMahakumaParisad	41.84	48.63	55.43	55.65
Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC)	0	42.24	42.31	44.59
Howrah	8.54	21.31	19.01	21.15
West Bengal	26.53	33.42	33.69	31.89

source :www.nrega.nic.in

Note : Women Share shows the percentage of Person Days Generated for Women

Table 5: Involvement of SCs and STs in terms of person days

	Person Days for SCS and STs			
Districts	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
24 Parganas South	46.81	46.89	42.08	18.69
Bankura	75.17	74.77	71.30	65.68
Birbhum	55.62	52.73	51.96	50.17
DinajpurDakshin	45.81	51.04	57.67	46.43
Dinajpur Uttar	54.27	44.85	45.13	33.67
Jalpaiguri	74.16	72.37	67.56	49.17
Maldah	42.52	45.59	42.93	26.21
Murshidabad	19.48	20.79	17.76	17.38
Purulia	58.32	53.69	52.08	40.03
West Midnapore	53.60	54.60	51.54	42.23
24 Parganas (North)	30.25	35.16	34.45	34.79
Burdwan	65.36	64.78	64.77	59.84
Coochbehar	51.78	59.65	57.08	58.48
East Midnapore	20.88	18.55	18.47	16.45
Hooghly	62.43	64.30	63.81	64.35
Nadia	30.96	33.56	37.58	36.36
SiliguriMahakumaParisad	54.32	71.69	77.35	74.87
Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC)	0.00	34.59	37.88	77.68
Howrah	39.56	34.66	31.37	24.71
West Bengal	52.26	51.24	50.32	66.73

source :www.nrega.nic.in

Note: Person days for SCs and STs show percentage of person days generated for Scheduled Castes and scheduled tribes in total

The programme is successful to bring only a small proportion of the rural population under the scheme. Lack of demand from the local people due to ignorance, poor planning and improper implementation by the local agencies may be the cause of the retreat. And here lies the need for active participation and mass awareness of the commoners to raise the transparency of the service providers and responsiveness of the programme. The strict centralized design of the programme also raises doubts about the relevance of the programme against all backdrops. Table 2 shows that all the rural districts predominantly dependent on agriculture and primary sector have been able to involve relatively higher proportion of rural households with the programme. Involvement of the rural mass with the scheme shows mild rising trend.

According to Table 3, average person days generation is above the state average in Bankura, Birbhum and Purulia. They are called the poorer pockets as the backward villages are larger in numbers in these districts and they rank at the bottom list in Human Development Index. It can be concluded that the NREGA has been a bold step to solve the problem of starvation and distress for the impoverished. Larger proportion of the demand has been met throughout all the districts. The percentage of the households provided with the employment opportunity as a proportion of the total employment demanding households ranges from close to 100 % in all the districts.. Percentage of households provided with 100 days of employment shows a scanty statistic in all the districts throughout the four years, which is a matter of utter disgrace. Neither of the districts have managed to create 100 days of employment for atleast 5% of the rural households except Purulia. Generation of employment opportunities for women (given in Table 4) is all along discouraging in all the districts. In the primary phases, only Jalpaiguri and CoochBehar and Purulia could generate about 23- 25 % of person days for the women. Darjeeling has managed to generate above 35% man days for women. The anthropological structure, cultural background, tribal concentration may have an impact on this result. Women participation has increased over the years. But it has shown encouraging trend in the backward districts like Bankura, ,Purulia and West Midnapore. Women participation is lagging in the districts of North 24 Parganas, Nadia, and Hooghly etc. Table 5 shows backward castes (SC and ST) participation is quite high and goes with the proportion of population in most of the districts. Especially, Burdwan, Banhura, Jalpaiguri, Hooghly have succeeded to involve a huge percentage of SC/ ST population. But Murshidabad and North 24 Parganas lag in involving the backward castes.

SECTION IV

Against this background, a micro level study was undertaken in the two districts of West Bengal (North 24 arganas and Purulia). Selection of the districts is purposive to make a comparative study as the two districts differ in terms of economic prosperity, geographical condition, soil pattern, socio-cultural background, ethnicity of the inhabitants. Again, Purulia is one of the 200 backward districts chosen by the Planning Commission of India. On the contrary North 24 Parganas has only two backward villages, quite urbanized and close to the capital town Kolkata.

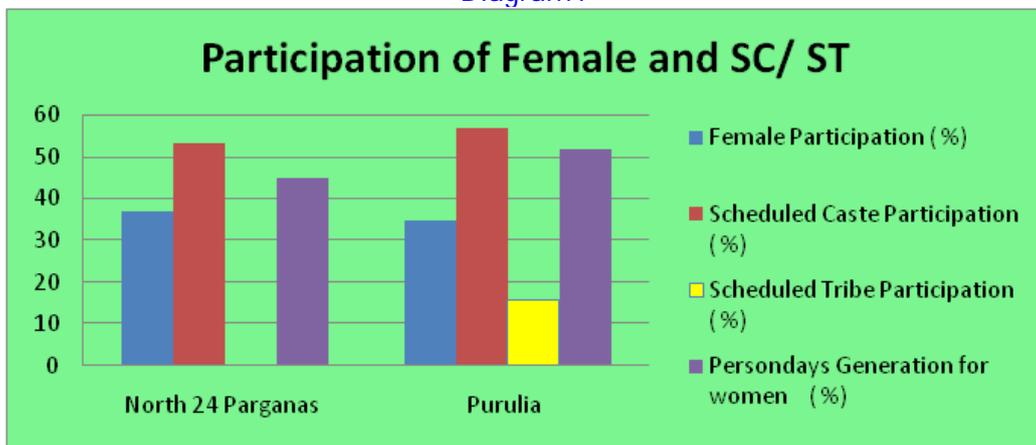
A micro level study based on the primary data collected randomly from the villages under two blocks of Purulia and North 24 Parganas, each is undertaken to know about the participation of the mass in NREGS and examine the self-targeted nature of the scheme. While proceeding with the study, we were trying to examine the socio economic status, and political background of the participants.

Emphasis is also given on the sex of the participants. Features of the participants under NREGS according to sex, economic status, caste, and poverty level is decomposed to know the extent of the involvement of the vulnerable and marginalized section with the scheme. The study also tried to evaluate democratic practice of the participants to understand the rationality of the Social Audit Process.

Table 6: Participation of Vulnerable section in the Scheme

Districts	Female Participation (%)	Scheduled Caste Participation (%)	Scheduled Tribe Participation (%)	Persondays Generation for women (%)
North 24 Parganas	36.7	53.1	0	44.7
Purulia	34.8	56.6	15.7	51.81

Diagram 1



Source: Primary Data

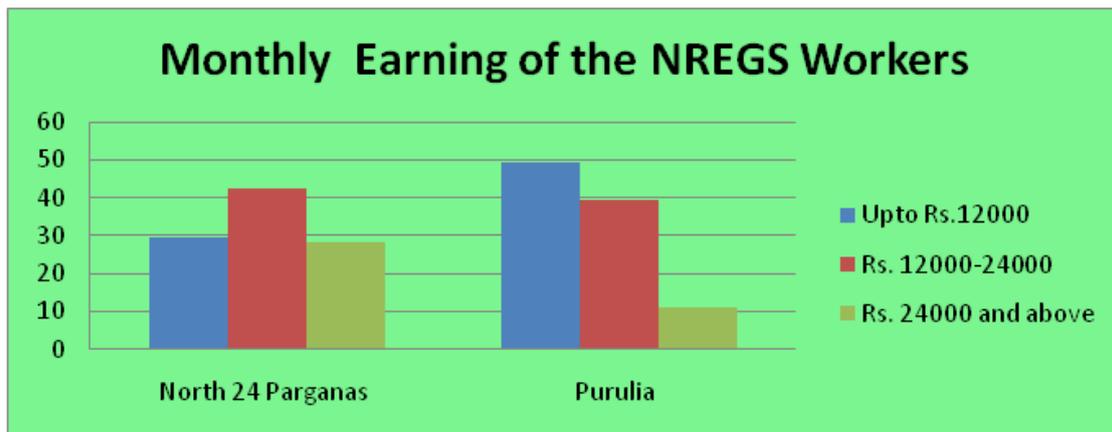
From Table 6, it can be seen that women participation in NREGS has reached the mandatory onethird level at the micro level in the two districts. Women involvement in Purulia is less than North 24 Parganas, which goes against the secondary data and our expectations. But Persondays generation for women shows positive trend and in Purulia, it is quite high. According to the primary data, the scheme is progressing well towards targeting the marginalized by involving the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Table 7: Income Range of the Participants

Districts	Annual Income Range in Rupees (%)			BPL status (%)	
	Upto Rs.12000	Rs. 12000-24000	Rs. 24000 and above	BPL	APL
North 24 Parganas	29.4	42.4	28.2	44.1	55.9
Purulia	49.5	39.4	11.1	68.7	31.3

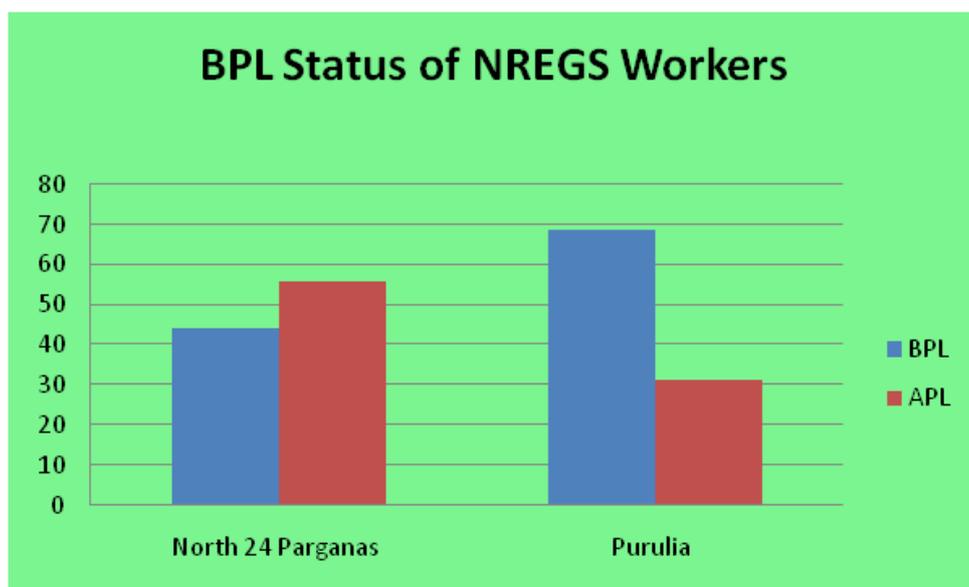
Source: Primary Data

Diagram 2



Source: Primary Data

Diagram 3



Annual income at the household level of the workers working under NREGS is depicted in Table 7 and Diagram 2. And from the table, it is very clear that there is large difference between the two districts in this respect. Poorest of the poor have not get involved in North 24 Parganas. Involvement of the people living below the poverty line has not been seen to that extent in North 24 Parganas, which indicates towards inefficient targeting of the scheme. Diagram 3 clearly portrays BPL involvement with the scheme. In Purulia, involvement of BPL households is large. Table 8 demonstrates participation of the beneficiaries of NREGS at the public forums like Gram Sabhas or Gram Sansads and the political adherence. Diagram 4 shows the difference between attendance and active participation at forums by the mass in the two districts. It can be concluded that that the Right to Work has enhanced mass awareness and made the beneficiaries aware about their rights. To some extent, they are interested to participate at the forums and make a query about the progress of the scheme. But there is a large

difference of democratic practice among the villagers between Purulia and North 24 Parganas. Acquaintance of the villagers with the cities access to different sort of information and awareness of the villagers in North 24 Parganas have resulted in a positive outcome on democratic practice. May be the external factors like Maoist interference, political instability, inactiveness of the panchayat system resulted in a sort of frustration among the mass. It was observed that most of the village panchayats in the Maoist blocks of Purulia remained defunct during the study period and villagers maintained a distance with the panchayat activities. In this respect it should be emphasized that there persists a large difference between mere attendance at the public forums (Gram Sabhas and Sansads) and active participation at these forums in the two districts. Most of the villagers who attend the forums remain mere listeners. On the other hand, the same political client patron relationship is determining the whole participation process. The political supporters of the ruling party are successful to reap most of the benefit in the two districts. The other dominant factor influencing mandays generation for the participants under NREGS is close contact with the panchayat functionaries. People who have acquaintance with the panchayat functionaries manage to get more man days under NREGS because they get all the informations about the schemes informally.

Table 8 : Democratic Participation and Political adherence among the participants

Districts	Gram Sabha or Sansad Participation (%)	Active Participation	Supporters of the Ruling Party (%)	Information outside the panchayats
North 24 Parganas	66.9	48	71.8	86
Purulia	44.9	16.2	72.7	74.7

Diagram 4

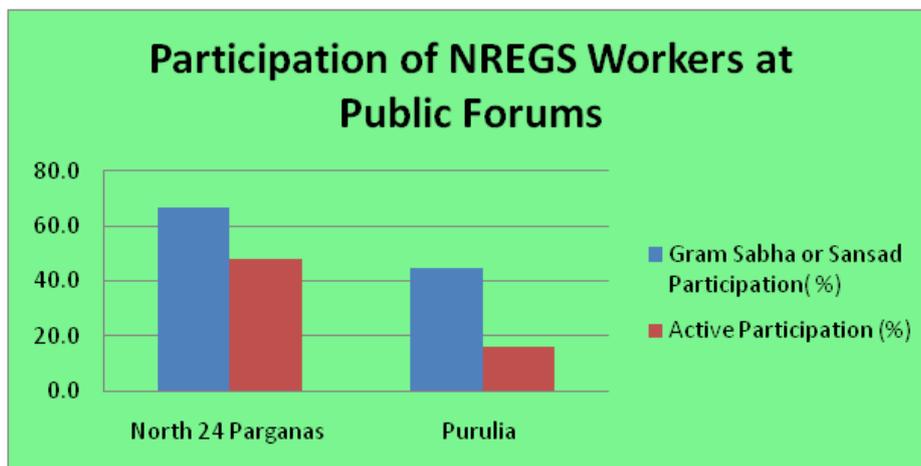
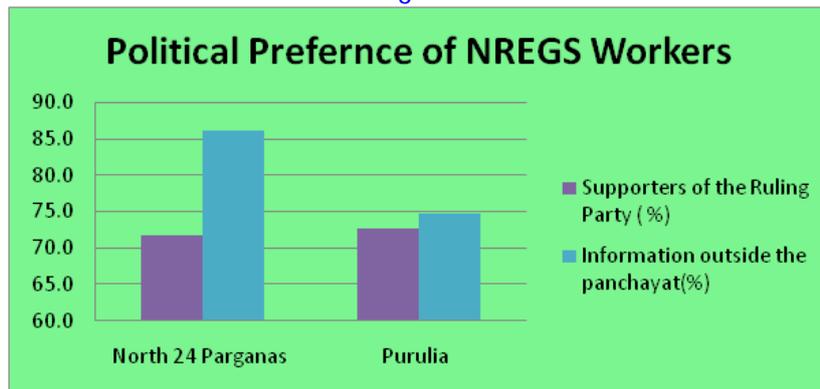


Diagram 5

**CONCLUSION:**

Though it is a right based programme, in reality commoners are not very much aware about the right based features of the programme. Among the commoners, particularly in West Bengal NREGS is perceived just like the previous wage employment programmes. Demand based feature of the programme is completely ignored. Beneficiaries are selected through a parallel political institutional system. Panchayats, the local institutions entrusted with the responsibility to execute the whole programme have not succeeded to mobilize the mass and make them aware about the basic features of the programme. Therefore, National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, as it can be said the Right to Work has remained unimplemented in true sense. But as a self-targeted programme, it has been quite successful in associating the vulnerable and marginalized section. According to the micro level study, the scheme is quite successful in associating backward castes, women and the BPL households. From the primary survey, it is revealed that who attain the Gram Sansads or Sabhas have the higher probability to be selected as beneficiaries. It can be said that the public forums are utilized to sort out the beneficiaries. But remoteness and absence of awareness have resulted in low level of active participation at public forums in Purulia. Again, it can be stated that illiteracy may be a cause of ignorance. In many instances, supporters of the ruling party join the public forums in a higher proportion. On the other way round, it can be concluded that participation in NREGS makes the commoners aware and conscious about their basic rights. And as a result, they join the public forums in a larger proportion. From the study, it is clear that distance from the city centre and backwardness does not play any significant role in determining benefit of the scheme. Extent of dominance of the panchayat functionaries in channelizing benefit varies in two districts. In North 24 Parganas information about the schemes are provided informally to the close and dear ones of the functionaries and party members. But in Purulia, closeness with the panchayat functionaries for managing benefit under NREGS is not dominant to that extent. During the study period, Maoist trouble was maximum in Purulia. Therefore, panchayats remained defunct to a large extent. Commoners were also scared of keeping contact with panchayat functionaries. The most dominant factor playing the key role in selecting the beneficiaries and determining person days generation is political influence. Like all the previous welfare schemes, political adherence plays the dominant role in selecting the beneficiaries. Therefore, it can be concluded that a parallel institution outside the panchayat system regulated by parties influences the self targeted welfare scheme. Supporters of the ruling party quite naturally have close contact with the panchayat functionaries and manage to get more benefit under NREGS. It can be stated that the same patron client relationship plays the determining role behind the benefit generation of NREGS and undermines the self targeting nature of the scheme to some extent.

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