



IMPACT OF MGNREGA ON WOMEN'S LIFE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF STAKEHOLDERS: A CASE STUDY OF HARYANA

Dr. Tarminder Kaur

Assistant Professor

Goswami Ganesh Dutta Sanatan Dharma College, Chandigarh

Abstract: MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) is emerged as a crucial step in the direction of providing employment and eradicating poverty to the large extent. The legislation is designed in such a way that it has encompassed almost rural society to cater the wider needs of employment and rural development. There is a special provision of women employment which shows gender sensitivity. The employment of rural women in MGNREGA is also subject to various socio-cultural aspects. The paper aims at knowing the views of stakeholders towards MGNREGA and its impact on rural poor women in Haryana.

Key words: *MGNREGA, women employment, Stakeholders, Rural development*

Introduction: After independence, rural development has been a major concern for Government of India. The constitution makers were concerned about the importance of equality and equal rights for every section of Indian society with special focus on weaker and marginalized sections. Article 14 of the Indian constitution prescribes that the state shall not deny to any person Equality before law or the equal protection of the laws in the territory of India. Article 16 provides for equality of opportunity in matters of public employment and prevents the state from any kind of discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, residence or any of them. MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi Employment Guarantee Act) as a rural employment programme was introduced by Government of India in 2005 and it was renamed as MGNREGA in 2010. It provides at least one hundred days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household in rural areas who demands work. MGNREGA is not specifically designed as a women empowerment programme but it contains gender sensitive measures to bring social and economic empowerment among rural women. There are various stakeholders of this legislation who are responsible for the successful implimentation and desired outcomes of this programme. Stakeholders play a crucial role in

understanding the overall impact and outcome of any programme or project. MGNREGA, as a legislation is not only intended to help the actual beneficiaries, but also to create a positive impact on the rural community as a whole.

MGNREGA in HARYANA: MGNREGA was launched in the state of Haryana in 2006 in the two districts of Mahendargarh and Sirsa on 2nd February, 2006. It was extended to two more districts namely Ambala and Nuh from 1st April, 2007. The remaining districts were covered under the scheme from 1st April, 2008. MGNREGA is fully operationalized in the state of Haryana and all the provisions are equally implemented in all the districts. Wages are being paid equally to both men and women workers through Saving Bank/Post Offices accounts of workers.

Methodology: The paper is based on primary sources of data collected from the two districts of Nuh and Ambala in the state of Haryana. Government officials at Block Level i.e. ABPO (Assistant Block Panchayat Officer) and Village Panchayats are taken as stakeholders in this paper and their responses about women employment in MGNREGA are comprehensively analysed. These stakeholders are approached and their responses are collected through interviews and questionnaires. Data is presented through Tables and Graphs and analysed with statistical method of Chi Square. This method is helpful in better comprehending and analysing the difference between two units.

Discussion and Results: The stakeholders chosen here are MGNREGA administrative officials and Village Panchayat, those who play a crucial role from planning, implementing, coordinating to motivating the rural women to take employment under MGNREGA. These stakeholders vigilantly observe the functioning of MGNREGA and its multidimensional impact on women beneficiaries' lives. ABPOs (Assistant Block Panchayat Officer) are taken as respondents who are responsible for MGNREGA work in villages at Block level in the state of Haryana. Basically, they are Programme Officers as mentioned in MGNREGA Operational Guidelines 2013, Ministry of rural Development, Government of India (*Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 Operational Guidelines 2013, 4th edition*). ABPOs are playing a key role in MGNREGA execution at Block level. They are responsible to receive and consider all project proposals from gram Panchayats, matching employment opportunities, assessing work demand, monitoring and supervising work implementation, ensuring fair and timely wages, maintaining accounts, complaints disposal and conducting of social Audit etc.

At the level of the village, the Gram Panchayat is taken as a respondent where Sarpanch or Panch, whichever senior representative is present, is interviewed. Gram Panchayat is a political mechanism and a strong institution of democracy at the grass root level. It also acts as a supervisory mechanism in MGNREGA functioning. Gram Panchayat is responsible for the following:

- a) To receive applications for MGNREGA work,
- b) Verify applicants,
- c) Register households,
- d) Issue job cards,

- e) Register households and
- f) Allotting work within 15 days of registration for MGNREGA work etc.

ABPOs (Assistant Block Panchayat Officer)

The four Blocks of each district of Nuh and Ambala are covered under the study, which are mentioned as under:

1. Nuh:
 - i. Punhana
 - ii. Nagina
 - iii. Nuh
 - iv. Taoru
2. Ambala:
 - i. Ambala I
 - ii. Ambala II
 - iii. Naraingarh
 - iv. Shahzadpur

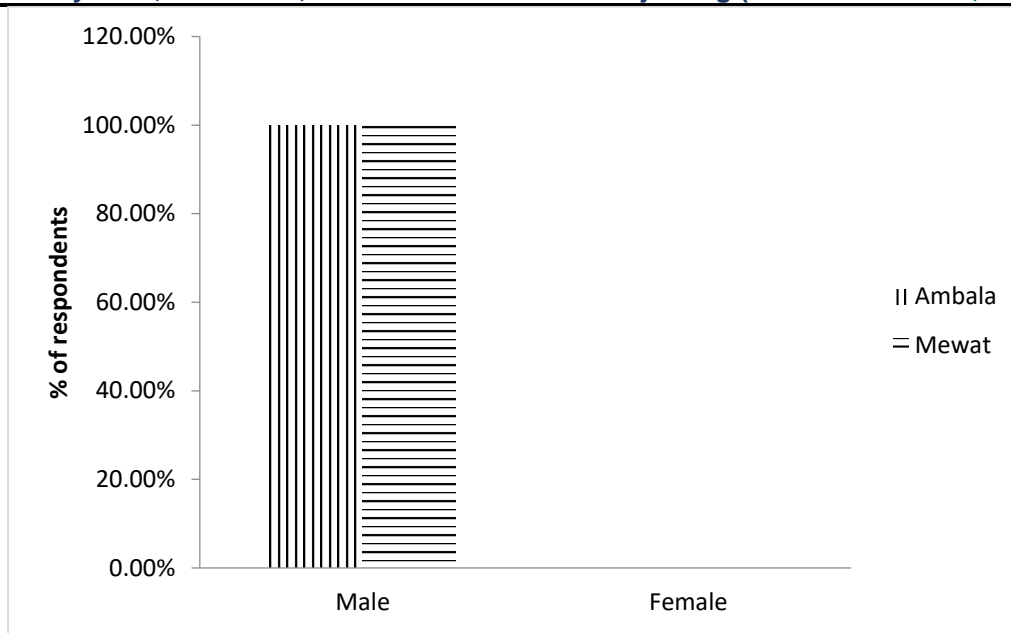
Thus, Four ABPO's from each district were interviewed and their opinions are mentioned in the study.

Table (i) Gender perspective

		District					
		Ambala		Nuh		Total	
Gender	Male	4	100.0%	4	100.0%	8	100.0%
	Female	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Total	4	100.0%	4	100.0%	8	100.0%

Source: Field data (2018-19)

It is observed from all the blocks under study i.e. four blocks each from Nuh and Ambala districts that all ABPOs are male members and no female ABPO is posted in any of the blocks under study. These ABPOs are responsible for all administrative MGNREGA work ranging from approval of proposal for MGNREGA work to execution, coordination as well as wage payments to beneficiaries. The complete absence of women ABPOs in the area under study indicates a gender bias. It leaves lot of scope for improvement in gender equity. To make it more inclusive, if women ABPOs are employed, it may be that MGNREGA women workers would be more communicative with their supervisors.



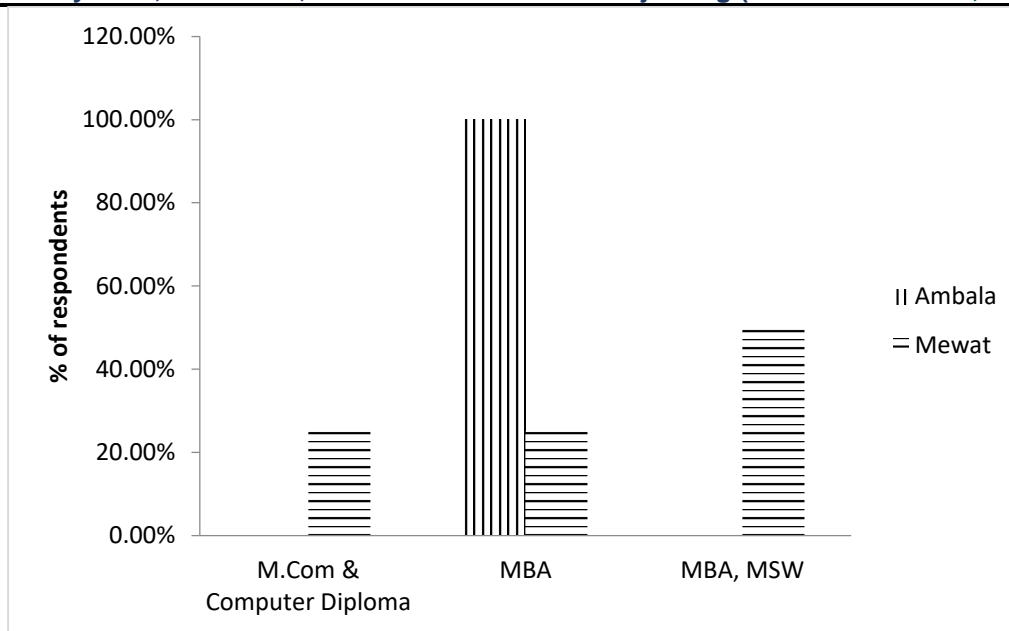
Graph 1: Gender perspective

Table (ii) Educational qualification of ABPOs

		District					
		Ambala		Nuh		Total	
Educational Qualification	M.Com & Computer Diploma	0	0.0%	1	25.0%	1	12.5%
	MBA	4	100.0%	1	25.0%	5	62.5%
	MBA, MSW	0	0.0%	2	50.0%	2	25.0%
	Total	4	100.0%	4	100.0%	8	100.0%

Source: Field data (2018-19)

As per the interviewed ABPOs in both of the districts of Nuh and Ambala, it is found that all are well qualified at the level of Post Graduate in MBA (Master of Business Administration), MSW (Master of Social Work) and M.Com etc. it is a desirable aspect that the well educated officials are appointed to look after MGNREGA who can contribute their knowledge and skills upto the best possible level for effective execution of MGNREGA.



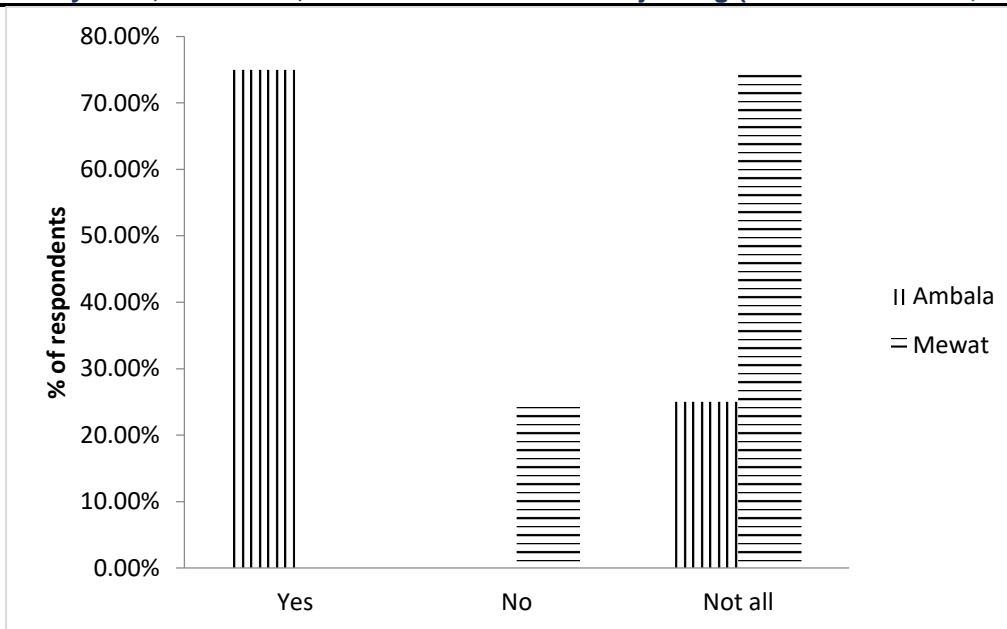
Graph 2: Educational qualification

Table (iii) Women completes 100 days employment in MGNREGA: Opinion of ABPOs

Opinions of MGNREGA Officials (ABPOs)		District					
		Ambala		Nuh		Total	
Complete 100 days of employment	Yes	3	75.0%	0	0.0%	3	37.5%
	No	0	0.0%	1	25.0%	1	12.5%
	Not all	1	25.0%	3	75.0%	4	50.0%
	Total	4	100.0%	4	100.0%	8	100.0%

Source: Field data (2018-19)

When asked from Officials whether women complete 100 days of work or not, 75 percent officials (ABPOs) in District Ambala responded positively that women complete 100 days of MGNREGA employment in a year. On the other hand, contradictory response is received from officials in Nuh. 75 percent officials reported that not all women complete 100 days of employment due to personal reasons. 25 percent officials in Nuh directly said that women do not complete 100 days of employment in MGNREGA. According to them, there are various reasons that vary from their household responsibilities of domestic work, ill health, engagement in agricultural activities etc. Sometimes they are barred from MGNREGA employment by male members of the family on the pretext of familial responsibilities. Due to the deep rooted patriarchy, women become powerless and thus surrender in favour of traditional household roles.



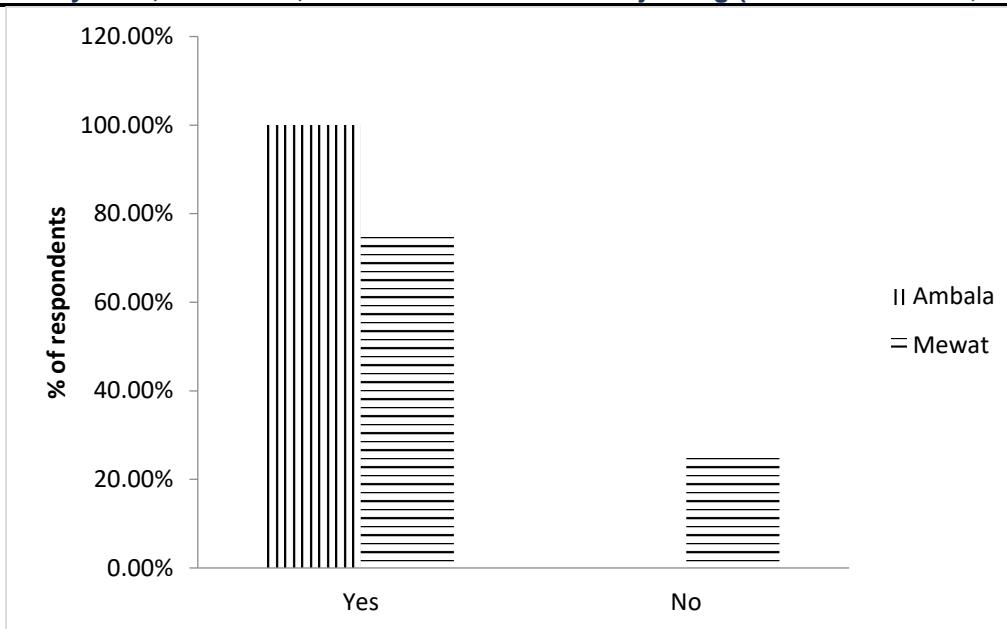
Graph 3: Women completes 100 days of employment

Table (iv) Opinion of ABPOs about availability of mechanism for women workers to express their problems

Opinions of MGNREGA Officials (ABPOs)		District					
		Ambala		Nuh		Total	
Mechanism to share problems	Yes	4	100.0%	3	75.0%	7	87.5%
	No	0	0.0%	1	25.0%	1	12.5%
	Total	4	100.0%	4	100.0%	8	100.0%

Source: Field data (2018-19)

Grievance redressal mechanism is a crucial aspect at any workplace. When the same question is asked from MGNREGA officials, 100 percent officials at district Ambala expressed confidence about the existence of an adequate grievance redressal mechanism. On the other hand, 75 percent MGNREGA officials in Nuh responded positively and 25 percent gave a negative response. However, the 25 percent negative response reveals that still there are some loopholes in MGNREGA execution at Nuh. It shows that all the provisions of the Act are not implemented in both letter and spirit. As per MGNREGA Operational Guidelines 2013, it is the duty of Programme Officer to enter complaints into the complaint register, issue dated acknowledgement and disposed it off within 7 days.



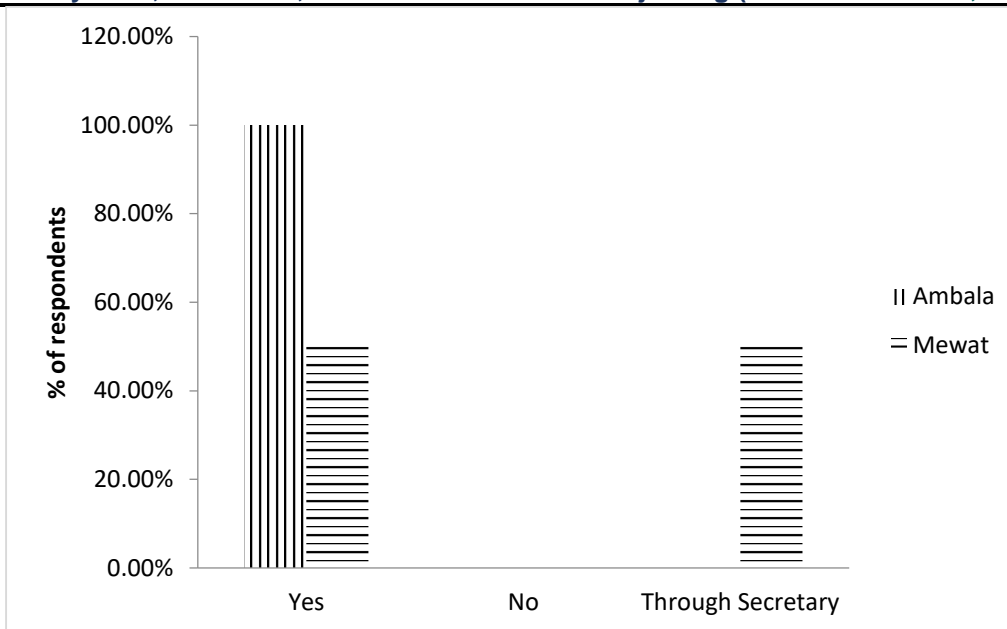
Graph 4: Mechanism for women to express problems

Table (v) Opinion about the regular inspection of work sites by officials

Opinions of MGNREGA Officials (ABPOs)		District					
		Ambala		Nuh		Total	
Regular worksite inspection	Yes	4	100.0%	2	50.0%	6	75.0%
	No	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Through Secretary	0	0.0%	2	50.0%	2	25.0%
	Total	4	100.0%	4	100.0%	8	100.0%

Source: Field data (2018-19)

Regular inspection of worksites is a major task of ABPOs (Assistant Block Panchayat Officers). However it is true that daily inspection at every village of Block is not possible. It is seen that this regularity is maintained by ABPOs as they visit the sites weekly or twice a week. When the same is enquired from MGNREGA officials (ABPOs), 100 percent officials in Ambala district assured regular worksite inspections, 50 percent officials at Nuh district responded in the same manner. The other 50 percent told that they keep a check through the secretary. The secretary, known as “Gram RozgarSahayak” is a full time observer at MGNREGA worksites who assists ABPOs in MGNREGA work at village level. The ABPOs are responsible for MGNREGA works at Block level and supervise all villages in the Block. They inspect MGNREGA worksites time to time. Accordingly, the supervisory mechanism for MGNREGA workers consists of Gram RojgarSahayak at worksite level, in coordination and under the control of ABPOs. The ABPOs are further accountable to MGNREGA administration at the district level.



Graph 5: Regular inspection

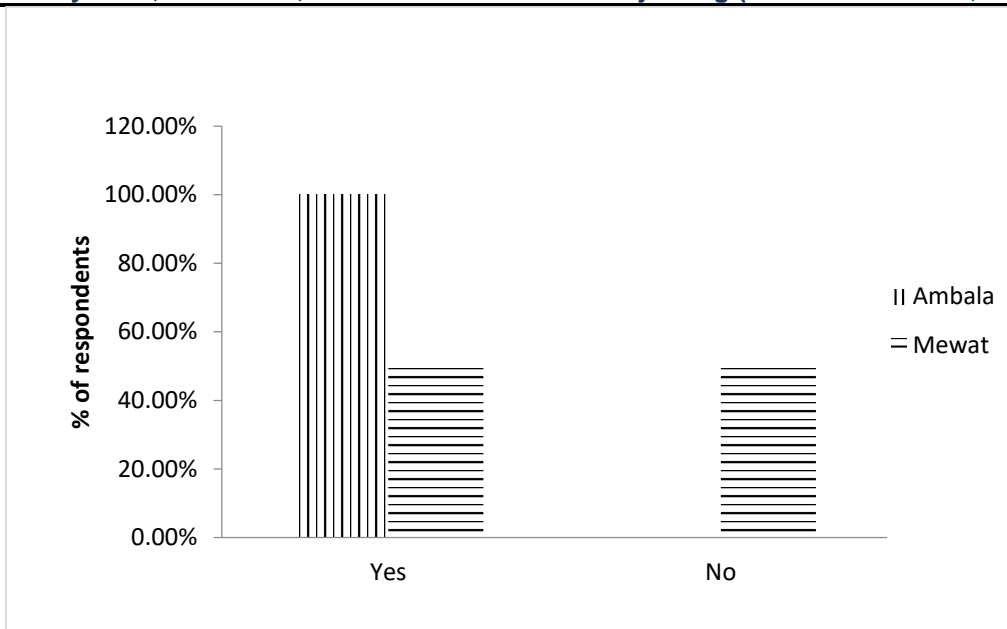
Table (vi) Opinion of ABPOs about regularMGNREGA wage payments

Opinions of MGNREGA Officials (ABPOs)		District					
		Ambala		Nuh		Total	
Wages are paid regularly	Yes	4	100.0%	2	50.0%	6	75.0%
	No	0	0.0%	2	50.0%	2	25.0%
	Total	4	100.0%	4	100.0%	8	100.0%

Source: Field data (2018-19)

When asked about regular wage payment to MGNREGA women beneficiaries, all (100%) interviewed ABPOs in district Ambala confirmed that wages are paid regularly. But in Nuh, a mixed response was received because only 50 percent MGNREGA Officials confirmed about regular wage payments and 50 percent officials denied about regular wage payments to MGNREGA women beneficiaries. It indicates a faulty administrative mechanism that weakens actual implementation process in Nuh district. ABPOs held that the delay in wage payments is due to the delay from upper administrative echelons.

It is a major issue as regular wage payments is an indication of MGNREGA’s successful execution at the ground level. Any delay in wage payments defeats the very purpose of this Act i.e. removing rural poverty through employment. “On the one hand, they lost out the daily casual wage that they otherwise could have received. On the other hand, the MGNREGS participant labourers, despite providing services to MGNREGS, neither got timely payment nor received any compensation. Therefore, they had to resort to borrowing” (Chakraborty et al, 2018). Vyas (2018) and Tiwari (2015) also reviewed the wage payment scenario in their studies on MGNREGA.



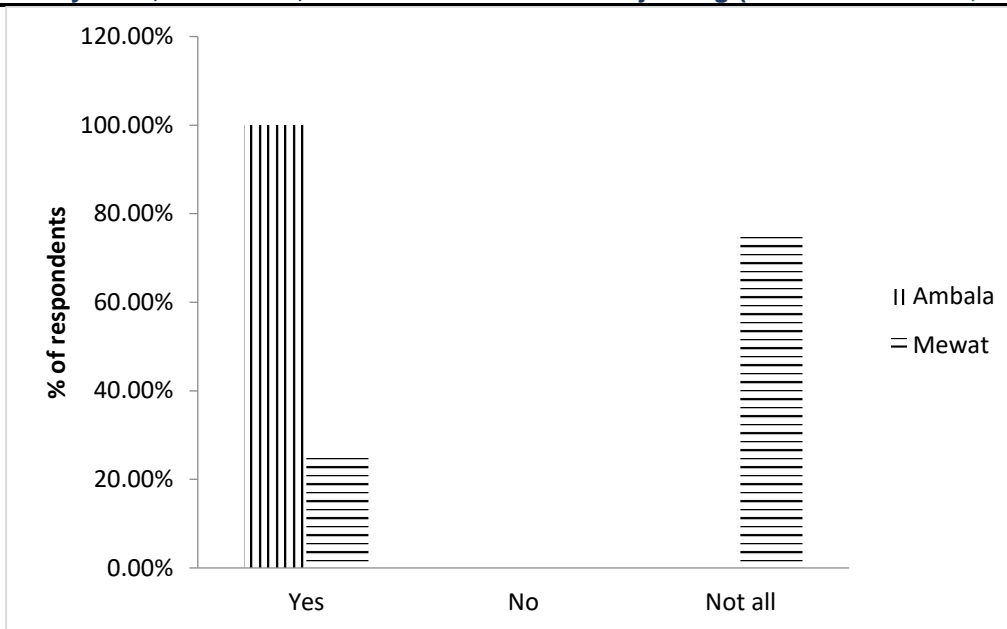
Graph 6: Status of regular wages

Table (vii) Women workers’ awareness about worksite facilities: ABPOs opinion

Opinions of MGNREGA Officials (ABPOs)		District					
		Ambala		Nuh		Total	
Awareness about worksite facilities	Yes	4	100.0%	1	25.0%	5	62.5%
	No	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Not all	0	0.0%	3	75.0%	3	37.5%
	Total	4	100.0%	4	100.0%	8	100.0%

Source: Field data (2018-19)

It is observed at both the districts of Nuh and Ambala that only basic facilities are provided to women at worksites. These facilities include drinking water, shade and medical facilities (first aid box). MGNREGA officials at Ambala district affirmed that all women are aware and demand basic facilities at worksites. These are provided to them to the extent as much as possible. On the contrary, 75 percent MGNREGA officials in Nuh district reported that not all MGNREGA women workers are aware about worksite facilities. It shows the level of illiteracy and lack of awareness about the basic facilities available to them under MGNREGA.



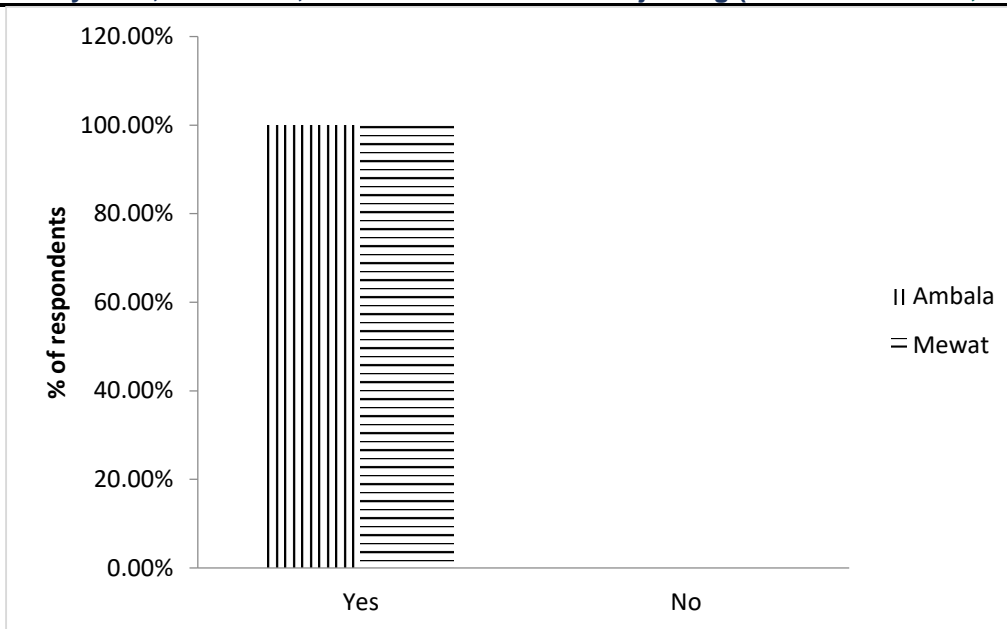
Graph 7: Women's awareness about worksite facilities

Table (viii) Opinion of ABPOs about the status of regular complaints disposal

Opinions of MGNREGA Officials (ABPOs)		District					
		Ambala		Nuh		Total	
Status of Complaints disposal	Yes	4	100.0%	4	100.0%	8	100.0%
	No	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Total	4	100.0%	4	100.0%	8	100.0%

Source: Field data (2018-19)

In both of the districts of Nuh and Ambala, all MGNREGA officials assured that all the complaints of MGNREGA women workers, if they arise are resolved regularly. It is the duty of the worksite supervisor, known as Gram Rozgar Sahayak that the work goes on smoothly without any problems. Thus, the response of 100 percent corresponds to Table 6.13 in the direction of complaint resolution mechanism.



Graph 8: Status of regular complaints disposal

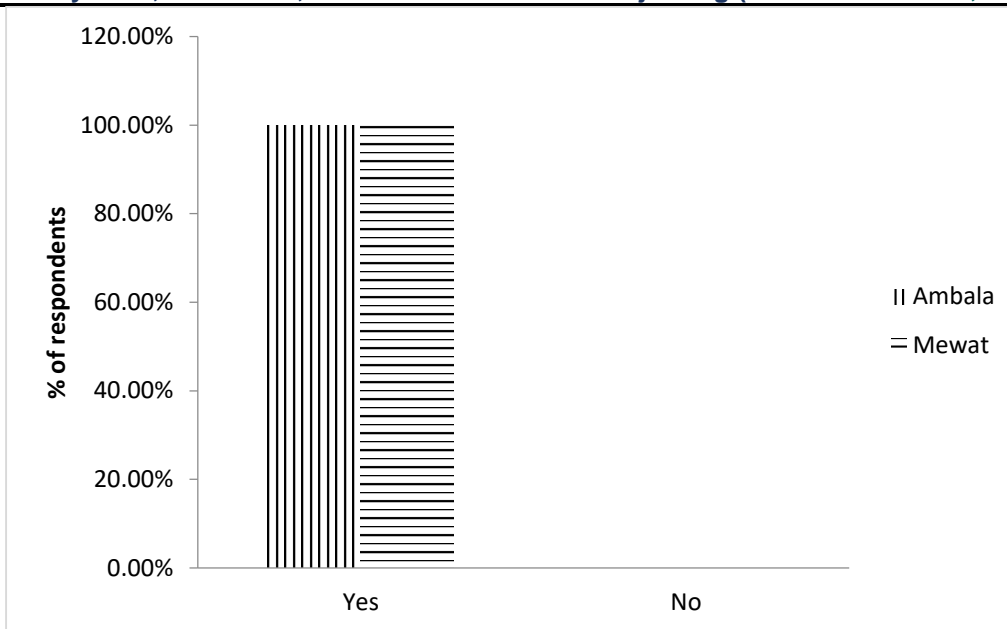
Table (ix) MGNREGA is facilitating economic empowerment of rural women: ABPOs opinion

Opinions of MGNREGA Officials (ABPOs)		District					
		Ambala		Nuh		Total	
Impact on economic empowerment	Yes	4	100.0%	4	100.0%	8	100.0%
	No	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Total	4	100.0%	4	100.0%	8	100.0%

Source: Field data (2018-19)

MGNREGA is a rural employment programme that assures 100 days of employment to rural poor with special provision of employment to women also. So, it is directly aimed at women’s economic upliftment. When asked from MGNREGA officials of the two districts, they strongly agreed that MGNREGA remained helpful to improve the economic conditions of rural women to an extent. It is through MGNREGA employment that they are able to fulfill their basic needs and are free to spend money on their own whims and wishes, earned from MGNREGA wages.

Aggarwal (2017) in an article said *“Fairness of Minimum Wages for MGNREGA”* said that half of the MGNREGA work is done by women and the income earned from MGNREGA helped to reduce hunger and poverty. The extremely poor people are able to at least operate bank accounts to access their wages , and participate in Gram Sabha to comment on MGNREGA functioning.”



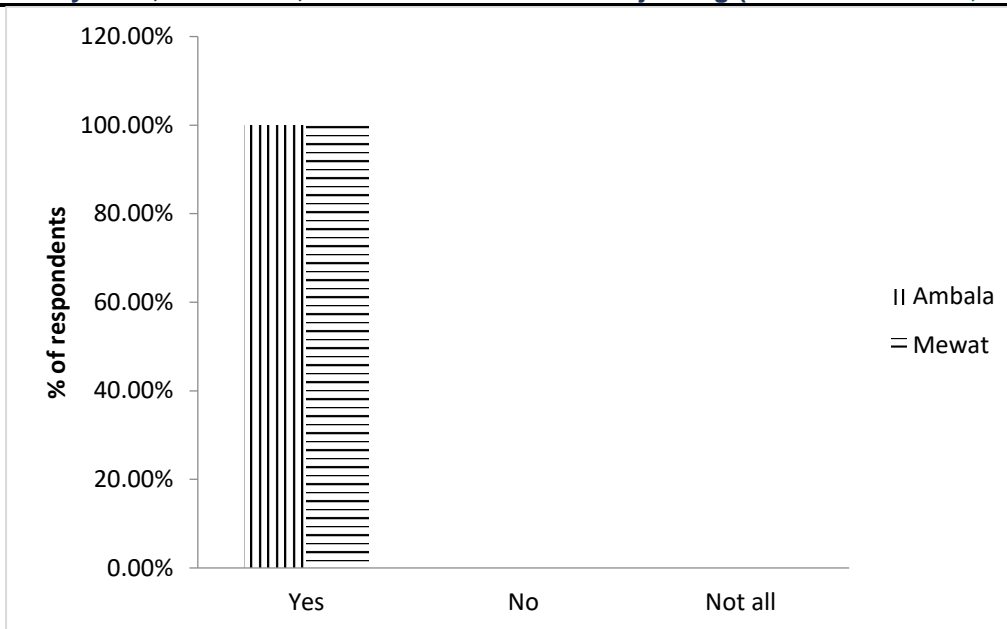
Graph 9: MGNREGA and economic empowerment of women

Table (x) MGNREGA is contributing to improve familial and social status of rural women: ABPOs opinion

Opinions of MGNREGA Officials (ABPOs)		District					
		Ambala		Nuh		Total	
Improvement in family and social status	Yes	4	100.0%	4	100.0%	8	100.0%
	No	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Can't say anything	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Total	4	100.0%	4	100.0%	8	100.0%

Source: Field data (2018-19)

“It is undeniable that MGNEGA has helped alter the rural scenario in India over the last one decade to a large extent” (Bhattacharjee, 2017). Similarly, all MGNREGA officials at both the districts of Nuh and Ambala also agreed that women’s employment in MGNREGA has immensely contributed to improving these women’s family and social status. It is true that that family and social empowerment of a person, especially women can be easily coincided with economic empowerment. MGNREGA women beneficiaries are emerging as co-breadwinners for the family and supporting household expenditures.



Graph 10: MGNREGA, familial and social status of women

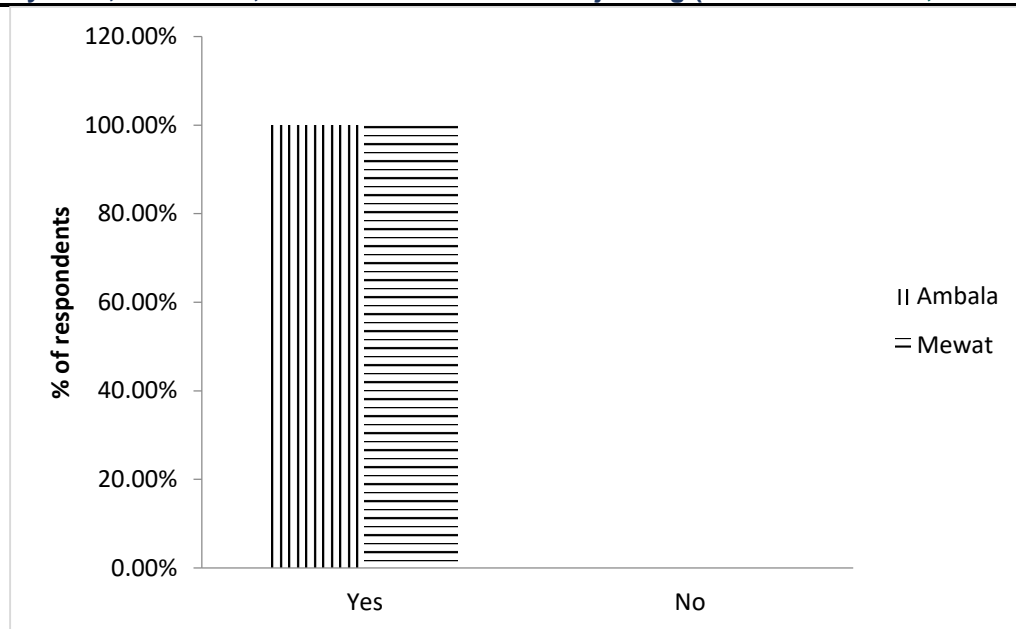
Table (xi) MGNREGA is successful in the State of Haryana: Officials’ perception

Opinions of MGNREGA Officials (ABPOs)		District					
		Ambala		Nuh		Total	
Whether MGNREGA is successful	Yes	4	100.0%	4	100.0%	8	100.0%
	No	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Total	4	100.0%	4	100.0%	8	100.0%

Source: Field data (2018-19)

100 percent MGNREGA officials (ABPOs) at the districts of Nuh and Ambala were of the opinion that MGNREGA is successful at the level of implementation and execution. Consequently, it is generating employment for the rural poor in general and rural women in particular in the state of Haryana.

At the same time, it is worth mentioning here that Haryana is recorded as best wage paying state to MGNREGA workers. In this scenario, Haryana can emerge as a success story model throughout Indian states. It is because, the low wages in other states are highly unremunerative in nature and brought stagnation in this employment programme.



Graph 11: Official's perception about success of MGNREGA

Village Panchayat/Panchayat Officials

At the level of village Panchayat, the Panchayat officials whoever the senior official (Sarpanch/Panch) was present, were interviewed. Six villages from four blocks each in both the districts of Nuh and Ambala were covered under the study, mentioned as under:

Nuh:

1. Punhana: (i) Jamalgarh (ii) Sri singalheri
2. Nagina: (i) Uleta
3. Taoru: (i) Rangala
4. Nuh: (i) Tarakpur (ii) Tain

Ambala:

1. Ambala I: (i) Bhari (ii) Saunta
2. Ambala II: (i) Khatauli (ii) KhuddaKalan
3. Naraingarh: (i) Dudhali
4. Shahzadpur: (i) Kakarmajra

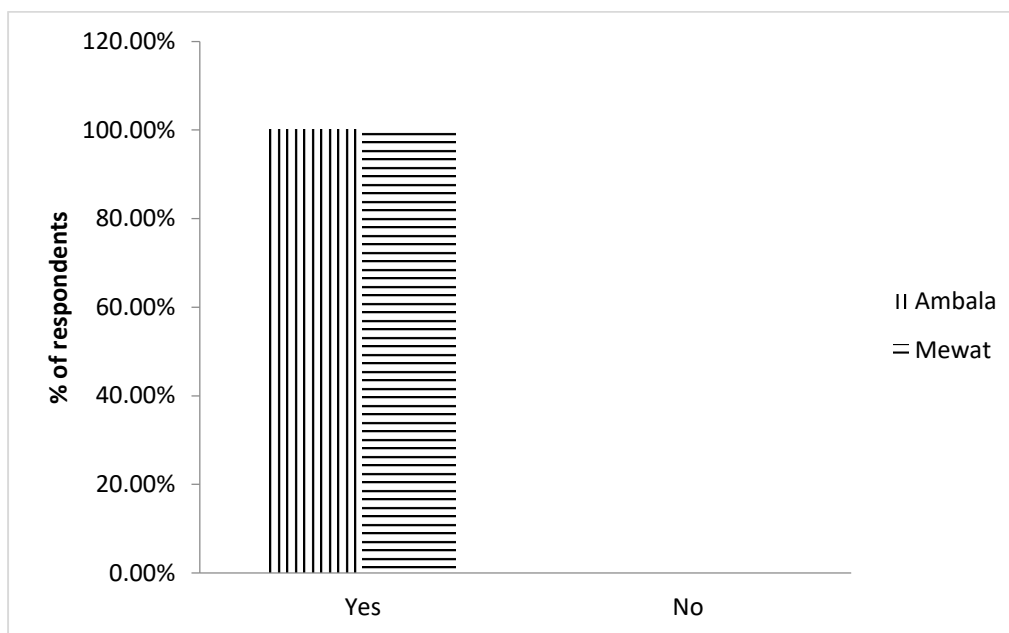
So, at the level of village Panchayat, the Panchayat officials (Panch/sarpanch) whoever was the senior member present were interviewed. The views of six Panchayat officials from each district are mentioned as under:

Table (xii) Opinion of Panchayatofficials about awareness of special provisions for women in MGNREGA

Opinion of Panchayat Officials		District					
		Ambala		Nuh		Total	
Awareness about provisions for women in MGNREGA	Yes	6	100.0%	6	100.0%	12	100.0%
	No	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Total	6	100.0%	6	100.0%	12	100.0%

Source: Field data (2018-19)

All the interviewed Panchayat officials at Nuh and Ambala districts confidently assured that they are aware about special provision for women’s employemet in MGNREGA.



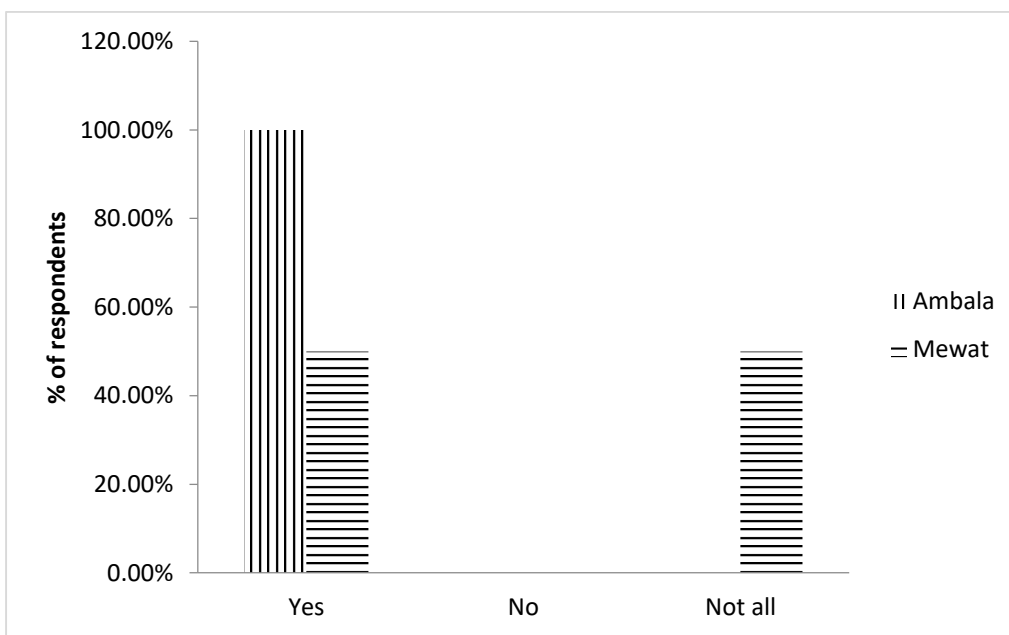
Graph 12: Awareness about special provisions for women in MGNREGA

Table (xiii) Opinion about awareness regarding MGNREGA among women

Opinion of Panchayat Officials		District					
		Ambala		Nuh		Total	
Awareness about MGNREGA among women	Yes	6	100.0%	3	50.0%	9	75.0%
	No	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Not all	0	0.0%	3	50.0%	3	25.0%
	Total	6	100.0%	6	100.0%	12	100.0%

Source: Field data (2018-19)

Special provisions for women in MGNREGA can be useful only when it is utilized by the rural women. In this direction, 50 percent Panchayat officials in Nuh agreed that rural women are aware about MGNREGA employment whereas 50 percent responded negatively by saying that all the women of their village are not aware. The Ambala Panchayat officials gave 100 percent positive response that their village women are aware about employment opportunities in MGNREGA. The mixed or average type of response, received from Nuh Panchayat officials justify the slow progress of MGNREGA vis a vis women in Nuh district, as compared to Ambala. According to them, this lack of awareness is due to widespread illiteracy and backwardness among rural women of Nuh. Thus, it is important to mention here that the illiteracy and backwardness among the rural women of Nuh is an expression of strict patriarchal control over them in every aspect of their lives. It restricts the exposure of women to the outside world.



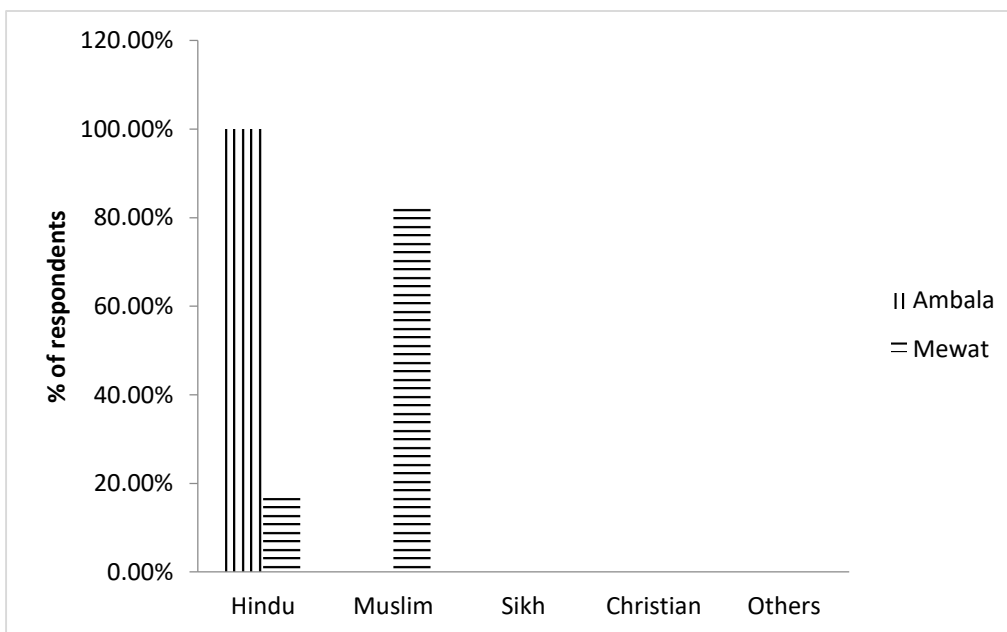
Graph 13: Awareness among rural women about MGNREGA

Table (xiv) Opinion of Panchayat officials about the religion of women employed in MGNREGA

Opinion of Panchayat Officials		District					
		Ambala		Nuh		Total	
Religion of women	Hindu	6	100.0%	1	16.7%	7	58.3%
	Muslim	0	0.0%	5	83.3%	5	41.7%
	Sikh	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Christian	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Others	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Total	6	100.0%	6	100.0%	12	100.0%

Source: Field data (2018-19)

As per the views of Panchayat Officials, Nuh District represents maximum Muslim women’s participation in MGNREGA. As per 2011 census, Nuh is the only district of Haryana which is inhabited mostly by Muslim population. Out of total population of district Nuh, 79.20 percent people belong to Muslim religion. Thus, maximum MGNREGA women workers in Nuh belong to Muslim community. On the other hand, census 2011 reveals that Ambala consists of 84.65 percent Hindu population and only 1.96 percent Muslim population. Accordingly, the Panchayat Officials in Ambala told that maximum MGNREGA women workers in Ambala come from Hindu religion. So, MGNREGA women workers directly correspond to religious equations in both the districts of Ambala and Nuh.



Graph 14: Religion of women in MGNREGA

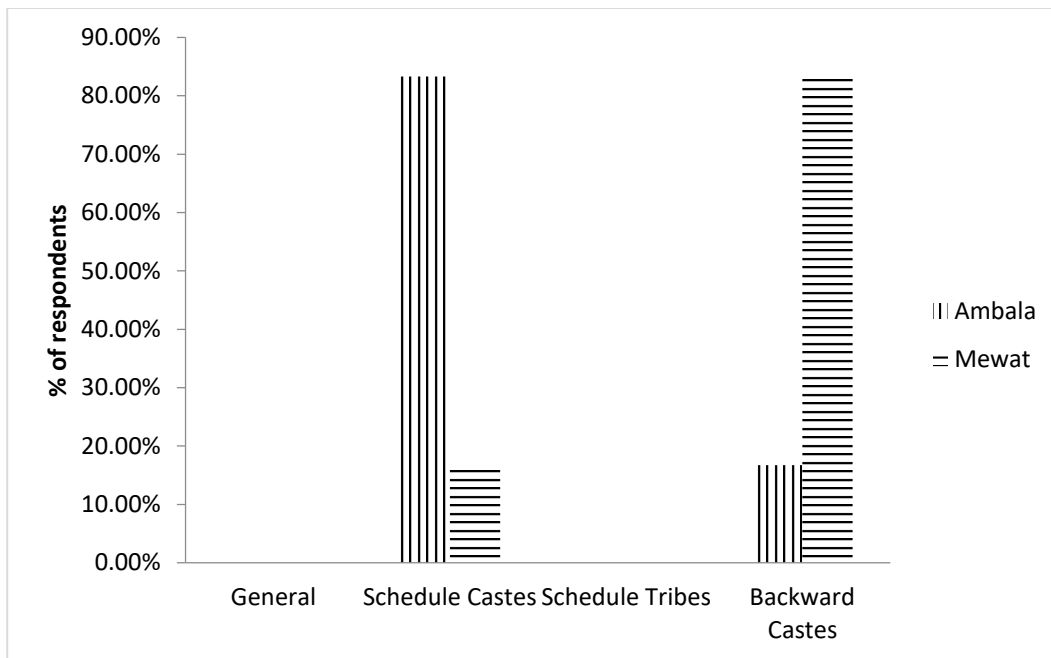
Table (xv) Opinion of Panchayatofficials aboutthe categories of women employed in MGNREGA

Opinion of Panchayat Officials		District					
		Ambala		Nuh		Total	
Categories of women	General	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Schedule Castes	5	83.3%	1	16.7%	6	50.0%
	Schedule Tribes	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Other Backward Castes	1	16.7%	5	83.3%	6	50.0%
	Total	6	100.0%	6	100.0%	12	100.0%

Source: Field data (2018-19)

It is revealed by Panchayat officials at both the districts of Nuh and Ambala that no women of General category are employed although caste is not a bar for employment under MGNREGA. Maximum Panchayat officials i.e. 83.3 percent in Nuh told that MGNREGA women beneficiaries belong to OBC. The Muslim castes here are provided the status of OBC by Govt. of India vide Resolution No. 12011/44/96 BCC dated 6 December, 1996. On the other hand, 83.3 percent Panchayat officials in Ambala told that the maximum women employed in MGNREGA belongs to SC category of Hindu religion. It is noticeable that OBCs in Nuh and SCs in Ambala are backward, poor and disadvantaged sections of society who are working as manual labour in MGNREGA.

“The Monitoring Information System (MIS) data in the MGNREGA website indicates that the labourers belonging to SCs and STs have been demanding more number of days of work as compared to other Caste Communities” (Dhaktode, 2021). It reveals that age old occupation hierarchy and caste relations still exist in Haryana. Louis Dumont in “Homo Hierarchicus” and W.H. Wiser’s “Hindu Jajmani system” highlights the existence of caste based occupational hierarchy in India after independence. Its biggest example in India can be seen at the level of manual scavenger jobs, which are still occupied by lower caste people.



Graph 15: Categories of women in MGNREGA

Table (xvi) Opinion of Panchayatofficials about the status of regular wage payment to MGNREGA women beneficiaries

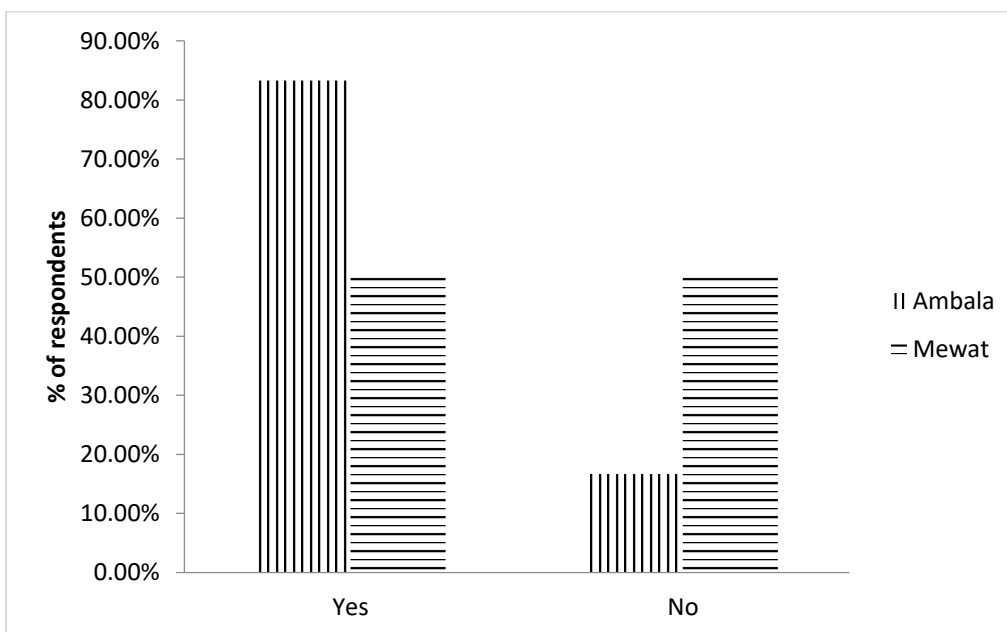
Opinion of Panchayat Officials		District					
		Ambala		Nuh		Total	
Regular wage payment	Yes	5	83.3%	3	50.0%	8	66.7%
	No	1	16.7%	3	50.0%	4	33.3%
	Total	6	100.0%	6	100.0%	12	100.0%

Source: Field data (2018-19)

In the direction of regular wage payments to MGNREGA women beneficiaries, a positive response is received from Panchayat officials in Ambala. 83.3 percent officials assured regular payments to MGNREGA women beneficiaries. A mixed response is received from Nuh where only 50 percent Panchayat officials agreed that wages are paid regularly and 50 percent denied regular payments to women employed under MGNREGA. *Even the Panchayats were helpless in this situation because after having sent the e-master-roll, the decision on the wages release lay with the Central and State Governments”* (Chakraborty et al, 2018). These stakeholders

say that upper administrative echelons i.e. administrative hierarchy at center, state and district levels is responsible for delay in wage payments.

“As per the official data, 70percent of MGNREGA wages were paid with delays (more than 15 days after the completion of a week’s work) in 2014-15; 64percent of the delayed payments were made more than a month late. In Punjab and west Bengal, the proportions of delayed payments were higher than 90percent” (Aggarwal, 2016).



Graph 16: Regular wage payment

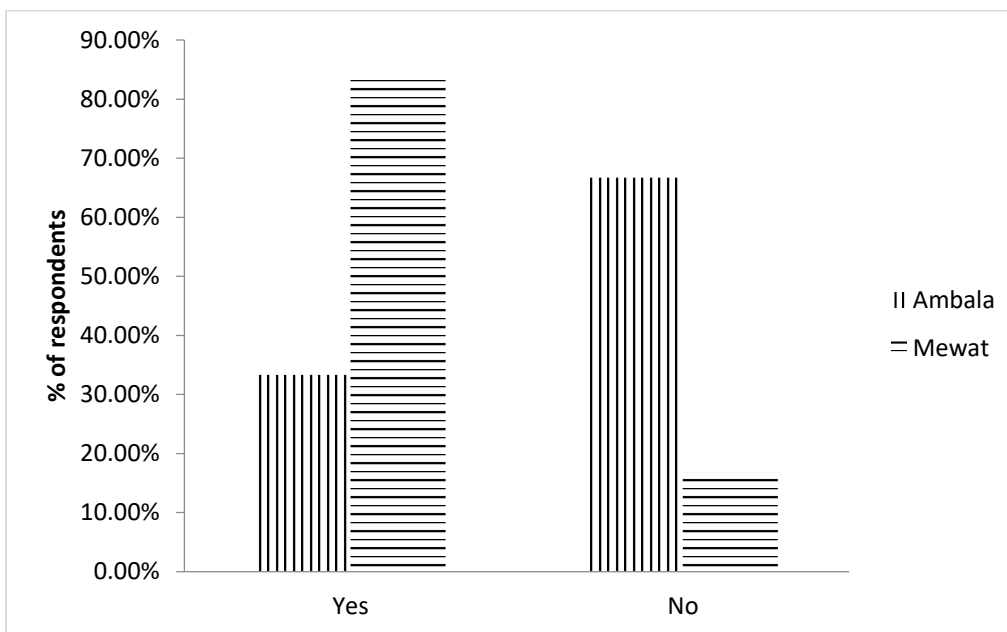
Table (xvii) Opinion about facilities for women at MGNREGA work sites

Opinion of Panchayat Officials		District					
		Ambala		Nuh		Total	
Worksite Facilities for women	Yes	2	33.3%	5	83.3%	7	58.3%
	No	4	66.7%	1	16.7%	5	41.7%
	Total	6	100.0%	6	100.0%	12	100.0%

Source: Field data (2018-19)

Providing basic worksite facilities is one of the main provisions of MGNREGA. In this direction, Panchayat officials in district Ambala expressed dissatisfaction with available facilities for women at worksites. It is proved that only 33.3 percent Panchyat officials responded satisfactorily. It shows the concern of Panchayat officials at Ambala for absolute worksite facilities for MGNREGA women workers. According to them, it will make MGNREGA work atmosphere more accommodative and pleasant for women workers. On the other hand, 83.3 percent interviewed officials in Nuh District expressed their satisfaction with whatever facilities are availed by women at MGNREGA worksites. It shows a wide gap in the attitude of Panchayat officials of Nuh

and Ambala regarding basic worksite facilities. It is important to mention here that as per MGNREGA Operational Guidelines 2013, basic worksite facilities include drinking water, shade and First aid medical facilities, but still Panchayat officials in Ambala are eager to improve the working conditions for women as compared to Nuh.



Graph 17: Facilities for women at worksite

Table (xviii) Women prefer to work as Agriculture/wage worker or work assigned under MGNREGA: Panchayat’s opinion

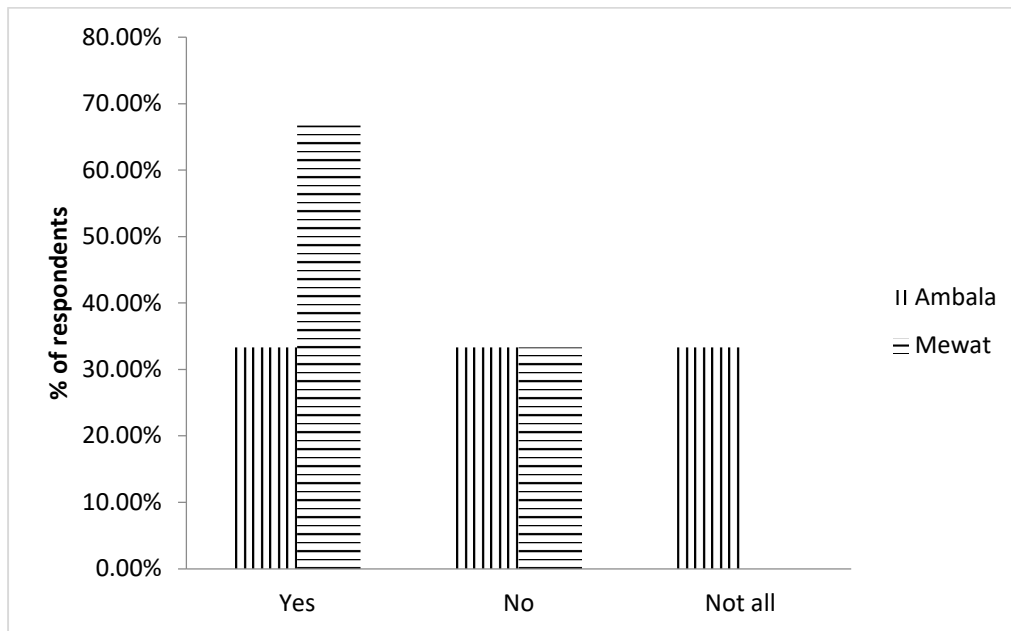
Opinion of Panchayat Officials		District					
		Ambala		Nuh		Total	
Women prefer to work daily wage worker or MGNREGA work	Yes	2	33.3%	4	66.7%	6	50.0%
	No	2	33.3%	2	33.3%	4	33.3%
	Not all	2	33.3%	0	0.0%	2	16.7%
	Total	6	100.0%	6	100.0%	12	100.0%

Source: Field data (2018-19)

It is an important issue to know whether women prefer to work under MGNREGA or to choose work as agriculture or industrial wage labour. In this context, 50 percent Panchayat officials at Nuh and Ambala districts revealed that rural women generally prefer to switch over to agriculture or wage labour in lieu of more wages than MGNREGA. Vij at el (2017) highlighted, “irrespective of equal wages for men and women in MGNREGA, these wages are still lower than the wages offered in casual work available in public sector. MGNREGA employment is thus a seasonal labour and is not able to fulfill the financial needs of household.”

The interviewed officials at Ambala have given a mixed response (33% Yes & 33% No) that some women prefer to work as agriculture labour whereas some others prefer to work under MGNREGA only. In Nuh, maximum Panchayat officials i.e. 66.7 percent also agreed that women generally prefer to work as agriculture

labour if they get more wages than MGNREGA. The officials at both the districts also revealed that the women mostly prefer to work as agriculture labour during harvesting seasons only.



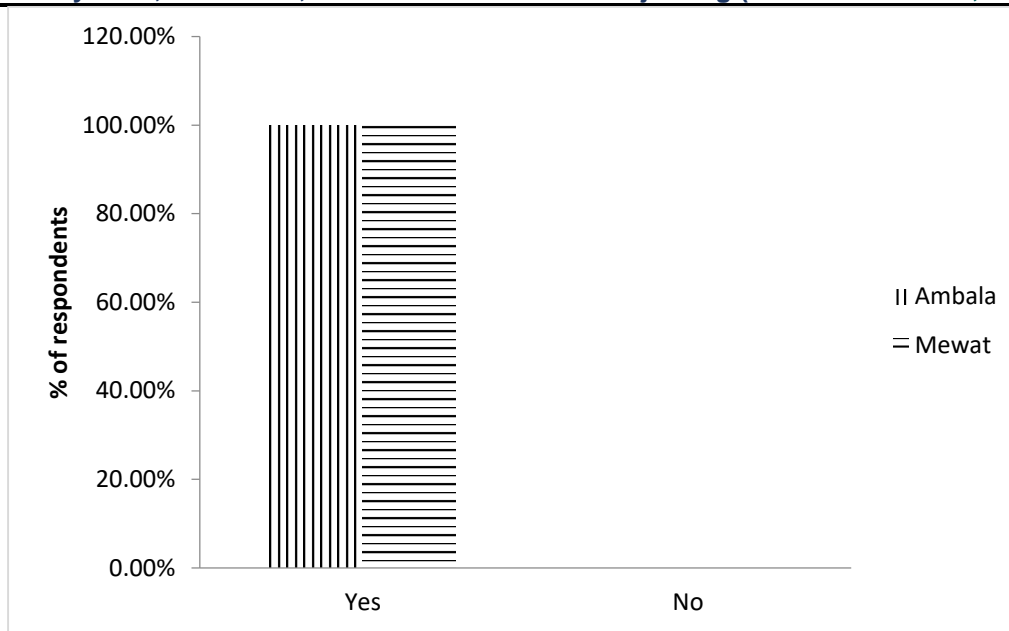
Graph 18: Women prefer Agriculture/wage than MGNREGA

Table (xix) Panchayat’s opinion about status of satisfaction of MGNREGA women workers with complaint resolution mechanism

Opinion of Panchayat Officials		District					
		Ambala		Nuh		Total	
Status of satisfaction with complaint resolution mechanism	Yes	6	100.0%	6	100.0%	12	100.0%
	No	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Total	6	100.0%	6	100.0%	12	100.0%

Source: Field data (2018-19)

100 percent Panchayat officials at Nuh and Ambala districts confidently assured that women workers are satisfied with complaint resolution mechanism.



Graph 19: Satisfaction with complaint resolution mechanism

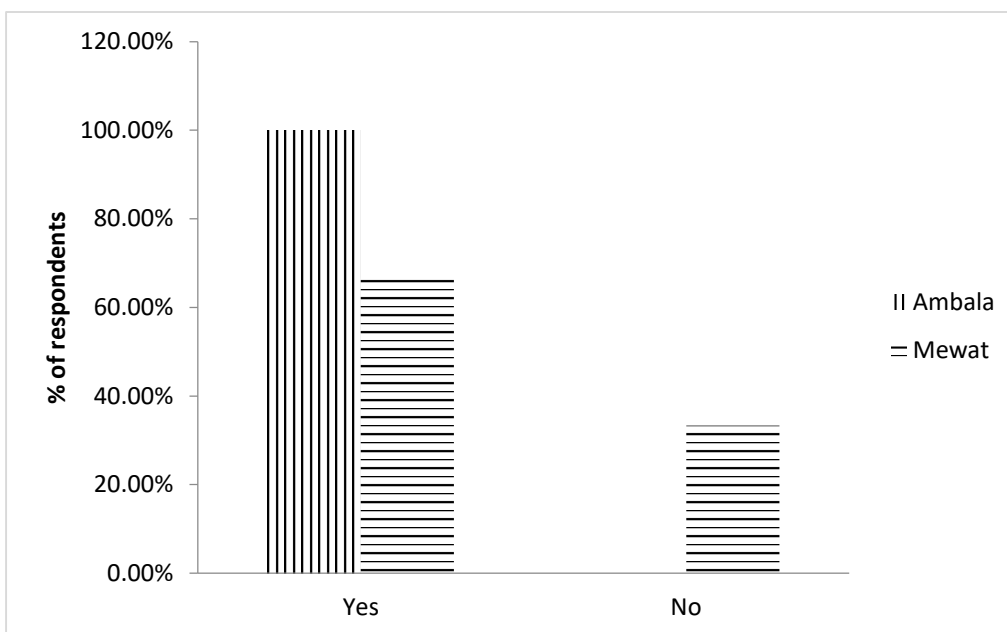
Table (xx) Any increase in participation of women in MGNREGA over the years: Panchayat’s opinion

Opinion of Panchayat Officials		District					
		Ambala		Nuh		Total	
Increase in participation of women in MGNREGA in number of women workers	Yes	6	100.0%	4	66.7%	10	83.3%
	No	0	0.0%	2	33.3%	2	16.7%
	Total	6	100.0%	6	100.0%	12	100.0%

Source: Field data (2018-19)

As per the field data, 100 percent Panchayat officials at Ambala district responded positively that number of women in MGNREGA employment has increased over the years. More and more women are becoming aware about MGNREGA and availing the employment opportunities. On the other hand, 66.7 percent Panchayat officials at Nuh also agreed that the performance of MGNREGA vis-à-vis women is improving as the number of women in MGNREGA employment is increasing over the years. But 33.3 percent Nuh Panchayat officials responded negatively which means they do not acknowledge any increase in number of women in MGNREGA. It shows that MGNREGA has not trickled down absolutely to the intended beneficiaries i.e. women in Nuh district. Patriarchy is still so strong and under its control, so many women are still denied the

fruits of Govt’s Social- economic welfare measures. There is a need to do lot more effort for women’s participation in MGNREGA at district Nuh.



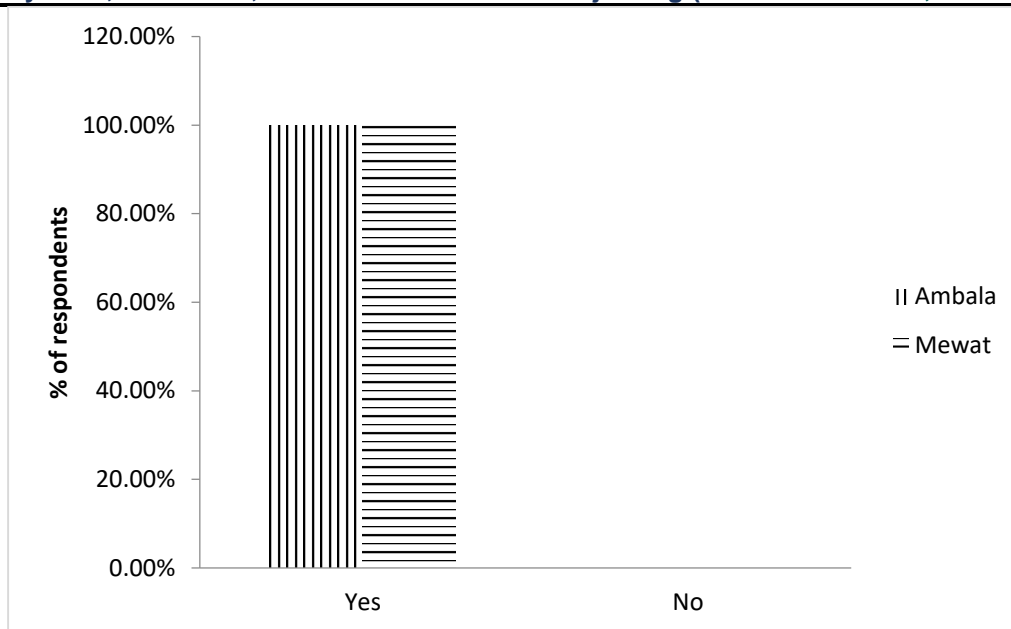
Graph 20: Increase in participation of women

Table (xxi) MGNREGA is contributing to economic empowerment of rural women: Panchayat’s opinion

Opinion of Panchayat Officials		District					
		Ambala		Nuh		Total	
Impact on economic empowerment of women	Yes	6	100.0%	6	100.0%	12	100.0%
	No	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Total	6	100.0%	6	100.0%	12	100.0%

Source: Field data (2018-19)

Positively, all the interviewed Panchayat officials at both the districts of Nuh and Ambala admitted that MGNREGA is really helpful in economic empowerment of MGNREGA women beneficiaries. MGNREGA has proved as a source of livelihood at the doorstep of rural women and assures minimum 100 days of employment in a year. The Act is a ray of hope for rural women, especially for those who belong to lower castes, who are otherwise not eligible for any employment due to illiteracy or unable to go far away for employment.



Graph 21: MGNREGA & economic empowerment of women

Table (xxii) MGNREGA is helpful to improve familial and social status of women: Panchayat’s opinion

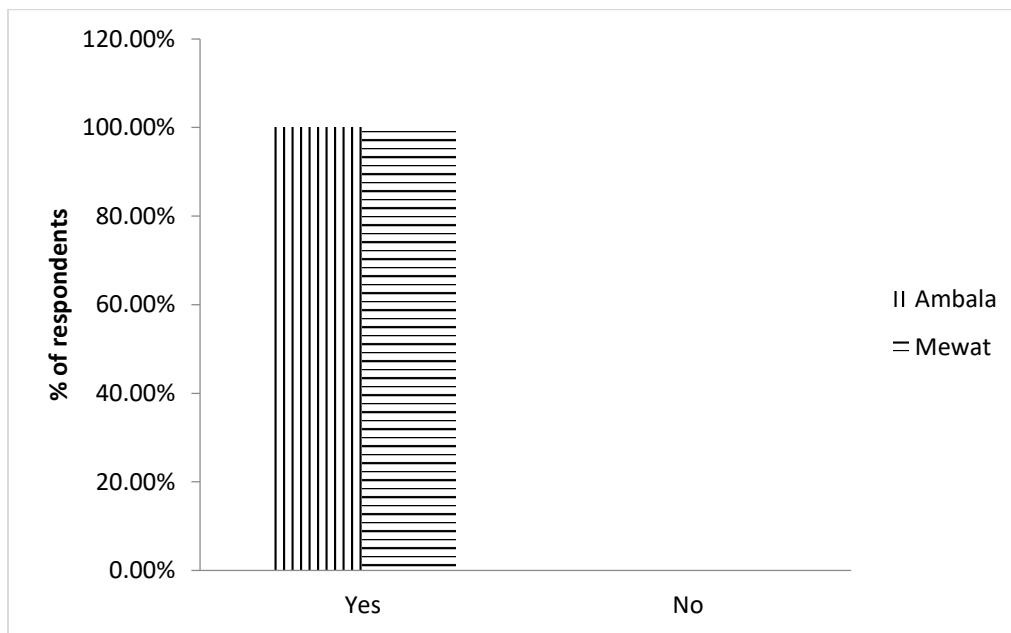
Opinion of Panchayat Officials		District					
		Ambala		Nuh		Total	
Helpful in improving familial and social status	Yes	6	100.0%	6	100.0%	12	100.0%
	No	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Total	6	100.0%	6	100.0%	12	100.0%

Source: Field data (2018-19)

“Social factors play a very significant role in women’s life. For proper implementation of a policy, women should have some level of decision making, social and economic autonomy” (Maurya, 2019). It cannot be denied that poor economic status of women has been responsible for their poor status in the family and society to a large extent. In this scenario, when the same question is asked from interviewed Panchayat officials, 100 percent officials at both the districts of Nuh and Ambala strongly agreed that familial and social status of women is improving after getting employment in MGNREGA.

It is true that village society is a close knit society where a family’s socio-economic status is well known. Social stratification is a part of the village social structure. Villagers are a cohesive unit where all socio-cultural festivities are collectively celebrated as well as inter-caste and inter-faith disputes are settled. MGNREGA as an economic opportunity helps to empower the women even at their domestic front. Gram Panchayat, which is a representative body of villagers, can closely observe the changing scenario in this

direction. At the micro level, MGNREGA is helpful to improve the family's economic status and at macro level, it remains a source of status upgradation at the social level.



Graph 22: Improvement in familial and social status

Conclusions: It is observed in the case study, at both the districts of Nuh and Ambala, that all the ABPOs (Assistant Block Panchayat officers) are males. MGNREGA's gender sensitive provisions are appreciable but it is worth suggested to bring gender sensitivity in administrative mechanism also which is governing MGNREGA. It can be helpful to accommodate and facilitate women workers. The ABPOs are crucial links between women beneficiaries and Government and thus can prove to be a major step to create women friendly ecosystem in MGNREGA. The gender parity in hiring officials for MGNREGA would go a long way in addressing the female workers' long pending grievances. It is found that employment opportunities provided through MGNREGA cannot be treated as stable employment in comparison to opportunities in market and agriculture sectors. It is observed that MGNREGA women beneficiaries prefer to work as an agricultural labour rather than MGNREGA, during harvesting seasons. Accordingly, the traditional rural economy, which has been predominantly an agricultural economy has maintained its impression till now. The true empowerment of women lies in their economic empowerment only, so the remuneration part is equally important to discuss in order to understand the impact of MGNREGA employment on women beneficiaries' lives. So, it is equally important to mention that women beneficiaries are not fully satisfied with their wages. But still, at the positive side, MGNREGA has been successful in altering the composition of rural workforce as more and more women are getting employment under MGNREGA because it is a doorstep employment opportunity. In the case study of Haryana, 100 percent stakeholders i.e. Administrative and Panchayat officials at both the districts have recognized that it has been successful in women's social and economic empowerment. Their social empowerment is very much visible in their improved status at the levels of family and society.

Now, they actively participate in the household decisions and raise their voice confidently in favor of more and more benefits for them. At the economic level, they are emerging as secondary bread-winners along with male members in the family and contributing in the family income. Overall impact of this legislation on the lives of women beneficiaries, it can be rightly said that MGNREGA has influenced the familial and social aspects of their life. It is revealed through the positive response of respondent stakeholders regarding family and social status of women beneficiaries. They have showed an optimistic attitude about the future perception of MGNREGA for rural women. Though MGNREGA provides only 100 days employment but it has been an effective antidote to rural poverty in general and rural women's poverty in particular.

As a matter of social assessment of the Act, the efforts of stakeholders are worth noticing and praiseworthy. It can be said that their continuous efforts can bring the desired outcomes i.e. real empowerment of rural women through MGNREGA. so, it can not be denied that MGNREGA proved to be successful in ensuring employment in backward and remote areas which are hit by poverty, unemployment, draught and other natural hazards. MGNREGA is designed in such a way that it has tried to overcome the problems of previous employment programmes of government of India. It is worth suggested that to make the best implementation of this Act, there is a need to overcome the shortcomings and take corrective measures. It should be in the form of timely wage payments, proper worksite facilities, adequate worksite monitoring and grievance redressal mechanism.

References:

- Aggarwal,A. (2016). The MGNREGA Crisis Insights from Jharkhand".*Economic & Political Weekly*.Vol 22(I), p.38-43
- Aggarwal, A. (2017). "Fairness of Minimum Wages for MGNREGA".*Economic & Political Weekly*. Volume 44(2), P. 18-21
- Bhattacharjee,G. (2017). "MGNREGA as Distribution of Dole".*Economic & Political weekly*.Vol. 25&26 (II). P. 29-33
- Chakraborty,D. & Kumar, P. (2018). "MGNREGS Raising Rural Indebtedness: Evidences from Micro Level Analysis in West Bengal". *Contributions to Indian Social Science*.Vol. 37 No.2. p. 243-271
- Dhaktode, N. (2021). "Caste in MGNREGA works and Social Audits".*Economic & Political Weekly*.Vol. LVI No.2, p. 35-41.
- Dheerja, C., NV, Madhuri&ADaimari.(2013). "Research Study on Factors Facilitating Participation of Women in Mahatma Gandhi NREGS", *Research Report Series-98, National Institute of Rural Development, Ministry of Rural Development, Govt. of India, Hyderabad.*
- Maurya,S.(2019). "Women Participation under MGNREGS: Impact on their Socio-economic development". *Contributions to Indian Social Science*. Vol. 38 No.2, p. 227-242.

- Reddy, MG., Mahapatra, BP. & Naik, J. (2019). "Current Implementation and Impacts of MGNREGS in Rural Odisha: Does this solves the problems of unemployment and Migration?". *Contributions to Indian Social Science*. Vol. 38 No.3, p. 506-526.
- Tiwari, N. (2015). *MGNREGA and Gender Equity*. New Delhi. Kanishka Publishers and distributors.
- Vij, S., Jatav, M., Barua, A. & Bhattarai, M. (2017). "Women in MGNREGS in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh". *Economic & Political Weekly* Vol. 32(2), p.67-73
- Vyas A. (2018). *Sociological analysis of MGNREGA*. Jaipur. Book Enclave.
- <http://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/focus-areas/women-poverty-economics> Accessed on 15-5-2019 at 3:29 pm
- <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/world-economic-situation-and-prospects-april-2019-briefing-no-125/> Accessed on 15-5-2019 at 3:33 pm
- <https://www.unfpa.org/icpd> Accessed on 29-5-2019 at 3:20 am
- <https://www.mdgmonitor.org/mdg-3-promote-gender-equality-and-empower-women/> Accessed on 29-5-2019 at 1:03 pm
- <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/> Accessed on 29-5-2019 at 1:26 pm
- <https://in.one.un.org/page/sustainable-development-goals/sdg-5/> Accessed on 19-7-2019 at 5:14 pm
- <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/> Accessed on 19-7-2019 at 5:36 pm
- https://www.google.com/search?q=census+2011%2C+mewat+muslim+population+official+data&rlz=1C1CHBF_enIN917IN917&oq=census+2011%2C+mewat+muslim+population+official+data&aqs=chrome..69i57j18575j1j15&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8 Accessed on 28-10-2020 at 7:11 pm
- <https://www.census2011.co.in/data/religion/district/209-ambala.html> Accessed on 04-11-2020 at 8:18 pm
- http://www.ncbc.nic.in/User_Panel/GazetteNotificationList.aspx Accessed on 04-11-2020 at 8:35 pm