

RURAL WOMEN IN INDIA: THE INVISIBLE LIFELINE OF RURAL COMMUNITY

Arundhati Bhattacharyya

Assistant Professor,

Department of Political Science,

Bhairab Ganguly College

Kolkata

India

700056

bhattacharyya.arundhati4@gmail.com

The rural Indian women are an epitome of strength, who is performing her household duties from dawn to dusk. However, her contribution remains unrecognized. Many after performing her daily chores have to work in their small agricultural land. Men perform operations involving machinery. Agriculture which is the mainstay of the rural Indian economy is sustained for the most part by the female workforce. They are the invisible life line of the agrarian rural community life. Rural women from childhood days have to bear the burden of taking care of younger siblings, cooking, engaging in domestic chores, looking after the fodder of the domestic animals in their parents' house. They are married off at a very early age. Many Indian rural women are condemned to a life of serfdom, anonymity, facelessness. In rural India, very few women have ownership over land or productive assets. This proves to be a road block in institutional credit. Majority of the agricultural labourers are women. They mainly assigned manual labour.

In 2005, the right to work has been provided to rural people, including women, under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). This flagship programme is slowly bringing in change in the overall level of empowerment rural Indian women. MGNREGS is for the rural people, including rural women, who are unskilled or semi-skilled. The Act states that at least thirty of the beneficiaries should be women. Several provisions, like availability of drinking water, shade, first-aid, crèche at the working site have made this scheme unique. Crèches are helping the rural mothers as they do not have to depend on others at home to take care of the children. Usually, the elder daughter takes on the responsibility of the younger siblings at home when the mother is away for work. This facility has relieved the elder daughters from this duty and they can attend school. This flagship

programme of the Government of India has been criticized from several quarters. However, with some positive intentions of the ground-level officials and the awareness of the beneficiaries MGNREGS can really bring in a revolution in the lives of Indian rural women.