

Status of MGNREGA Workers in Rural Areas: A Case Study of Bhaderwah Tehsil

Anghat Singh¹, Sheetal²

¹Lecturer, Department of Geography, Govt. Degree College Bhaderwah.

²P.G. Student, Department of Geography, Bhaderwah Campus, University of Jammu

ABSTRACT

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), enacted in 2005, is a flagship poverty alleviation program by the Government of India aimed at enhancing livelihood security in rural areas by guaranteeing 100 days of wage employment per year to every rural household. Initially implemented in 200 districts, MGNREGA expanded nationwide, excluding fully urban districts, by April 2008. The program focuses on works related to water conservation, afforestation, irrigation, land development, and rural connectivity. This study assesses the impact of MGNREGA in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), focusing on awareness, job card issuance, and the program's role in rural upliftment. J&K, a state with a significant rural population, introduced MGNREGA in 2006 and now implements it across all districts. Primary data were collected through surveys of 60 MGNREGA job card holders in three villages, supplemented by secondary demographic data. The findings reveal age, gender, educational distribution, and religious affiliation among respondents, with a notable participation gap between male and female workers. The majority of respondents were aware of the program through Gram Panchayats. Issues such as delays in job card issuance and work allocation were highlighted. The study emphasizes the need for better communication, timely work provision, and skill development to enhance the program's effectiveness. The results contribute to understanding MGNREGA's implementation challenges and its impact on rural development in J&K.

Keywords: MGNREGA, Poverty Alleviation, Livelihood Security, Rural Area, Wage, Employment, Job Card, Water Conservation, Rural Upliftment, Skill Development, Work Allocation, Timely Work Provision.

1.1. INTRODUCTION

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was enacted by the Government of India in the monsoon session of 2005, aiming to ensure livelihood security for the rural population (Holmes, Morgan, & Hagen-Zanker, 2010). Originally known as the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), MGNREGA has become one of the largest poverty alleviation programs globally since its inception (Ghose, 2012). The Act guarantees 100 days of wage employment annually to every rural household with adult members willing to perform unskilled manual labour at the statutory minimum wage (Garg & Yadav, 2010). Additionally, it focuses on creating durable assets to support livelihood security (Dhiman, 2011). Upon its legalization, MGNREGA was initially implemented in 200 of India's most backward districts. The coverage expanded to 130 more districts on April 1, 2008, and by October 2008, it was operational nationwide, excluding districts with 100% urban populations

(Kapur et al., 2011). In October 2009, the program was renamed MGNREGA (Pattanaik, 2009). The Act prioritizes various works, including water conservation, afforestation, irrigation, land development, and rural connectivity enhancement (Azam, 2012). MGNREGA operates through a five-tier implementation structure from the Gram Panchayat to the Central Government, ensuring effective program execution (Bipul & Sebak, 2013). In Jammu and Kashmir, the program commenced in February 2006 in three districts Doda, Poonch, and Kupwara and has since expanded state wise (Manhas & Kumar, 2017). By the 2017-18 financial year, 12.35 lakh households in Jammu and Kashmir were issued job cards, with 379.25 lakh person-days of employment provided, highlighting the scheme’s significant impact on the state’s predominantly rural population

1.2. STUDY AREA

Bhaderwah is a picturesque valley located in the North-west Himalayas within the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, approximately 220 km from Jammu. The valley, renowned for its breath-taking landscapes, is surrounded by evergreen forests and snow-capped peaks. It is often referred to as “Chhota Kashmir” due to its numerous attractive tourist sites and stunning natural beauty, especially appealing during the summer season. A notable feature of Bhaderwah is the Neeru River, which meanders through the valley, enhancing its scenic charm. The area shares its south eastern border with the Chamba district of Himachal Pradesh and is bordered by the Kathua district to the south, Udhampur district to the west, and Tehsil Gandoh to the north. The valley's mountainous terrain results in a significant range of altitudes, from 5,290 feet to 14,500 feet. Bhaderwah’s geographical coordinates are 32° 58’ N latitude and 75° 42’ E longitude. Temperatures in the area range from 26°C to 29°C during summer and from 2°C to 15°C in winter.



1.3. MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY

This study integrates both primary and secondary data sources to ensure comprehensive analysis. Primary data were collected via surveys using well-defined questionnaires administered in three selected villages Buttla, Nalthi, and Saringal located around Bhaderwah town. These villages were chosen based on their

physiographic and population characteristics. In the first stage, stratified random sampling was applied to select 40 households from these villages, representing 10 percent of the total households. This resulted in a sample of approximately 60 MGNREGA job card holders, allowing for a comparative analysis across the villages. For data analysis, the study employs the simple percentage method to interpret the collected data. Diagrams and graphs are generated using Microsoft Excel to visually represent the findings. Map preparation involves creating a locational map of the study area using ArcGIS 10.5 software. This process includes georeferencing and digitizing the Jammu and Kashmir union territory into smaller units to accurately delineate the study area.

1.4. OBJECTIVES

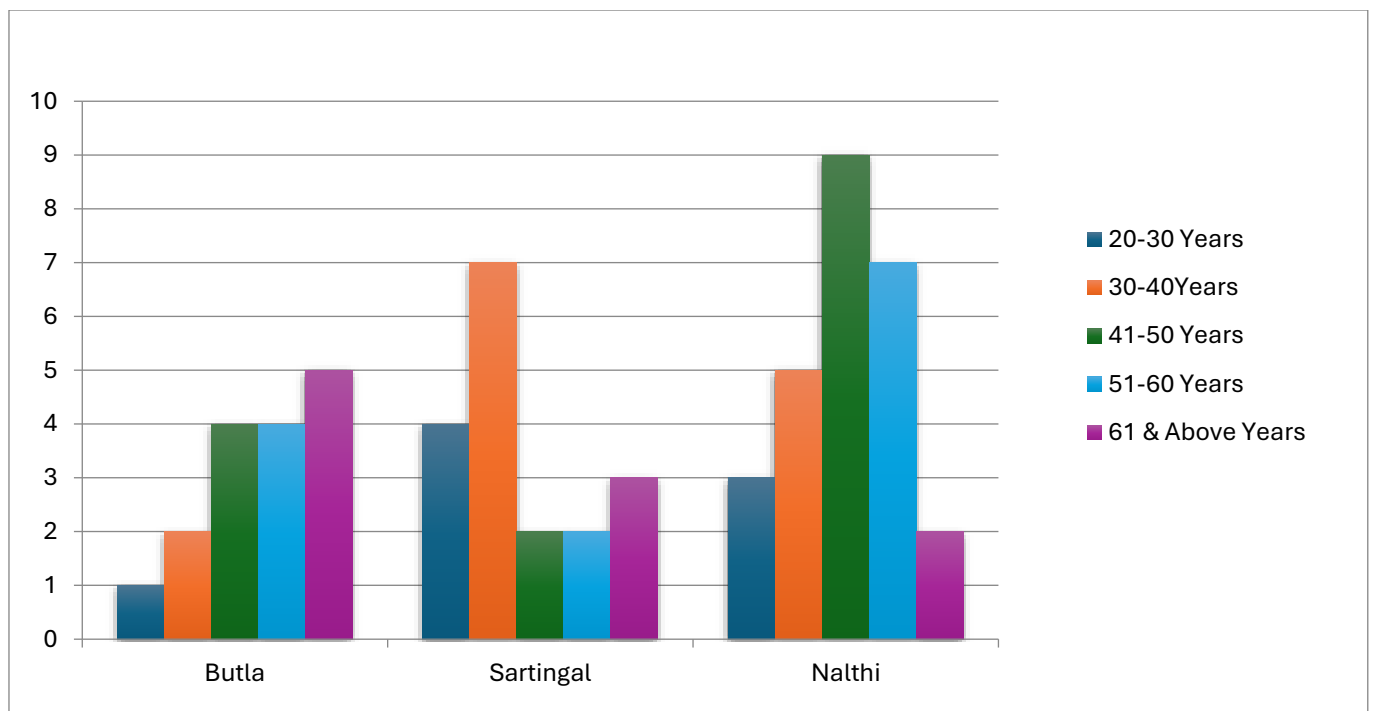
1. To assess the impact of MGNREGA in the study area
2. To analyse the awareness level Awareness about MGNREGA
3. To analyse the Issue of Job Cards and Registration
4. To evaluate the impact of MGNREGA on the rural upliftment in the study area.

1.5. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Number of respondents in different age groups

Village	Age groups in years					Total
	20-30 Years	30-40 Years	41-50 Years	51-60 Years	61 & Above Years	
Butla	1 (6.2%)	2 (12.5%)	4 (25%)	4 (25%)	5 (31.2%)	16 (100%)
Sartingal	4 (22%)	7(38.8%)	2 (11%)	2 (11%)	3 (16.8%)	18 (100%)
Nalthi	3 (11.5%)	5 (19.2%)	9 (34.6%)	7 (26.9%)	2 (7.6%)	26 (100%)
Total	8 (13%)	14 (23.3%)	15 (25%)	13 (24.6%)	10 (16.6%)	60 (100%)

Source: Field Survey 2023

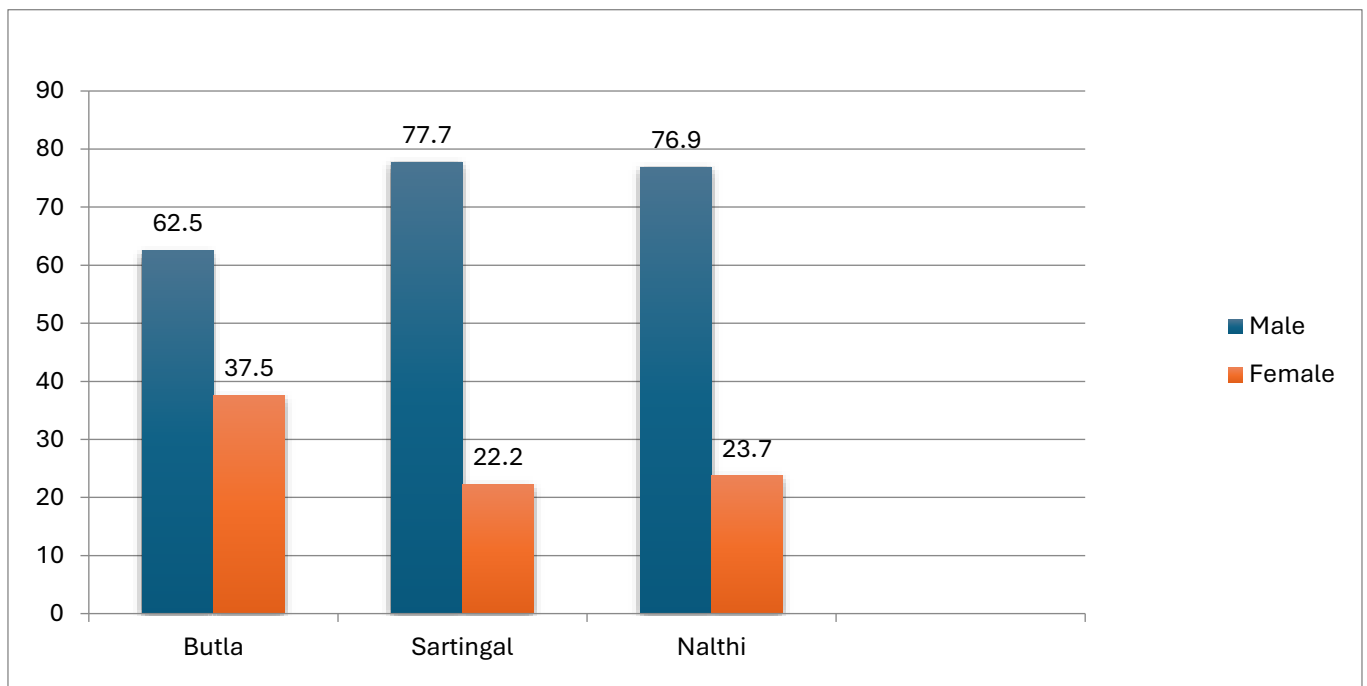


The table 2 presents the distribution of respondents' age groups participating in NREGS across three villages: Butla, Sartingal, and Nalthi. In Butla, the largest group of workers (31.2%) is aged 61 and above, indicating a significant representation of older individuals in NREGS. Sartingal shows a different trend, with the majority (38.8%) of workers in the 30-40 age group. In Nalthi, the highest proportion (34.6%) of NREGS workers falls within the 41-50 age group. This data underscores the role of age in determining social mobility and the specific social roles individuals play within these villages, with each village exhibiting distinct age-related participation patterns in NREGS.

Table 2: Distribution of sample's respondent's sex wise.

Village	Male	Female	Total
Butla	10 (62.5%)	6 (37.5%)	16 (100%)
Sartingal	14 (77.7%)	4 (22.2%)	18 (100%)
Nalthi	20 (76.9%)	6 (23.07%)	26 (100%)
Total	44 (73.3%)	16 (26.6%)	60 (100%)

Source: Field Survey 2023

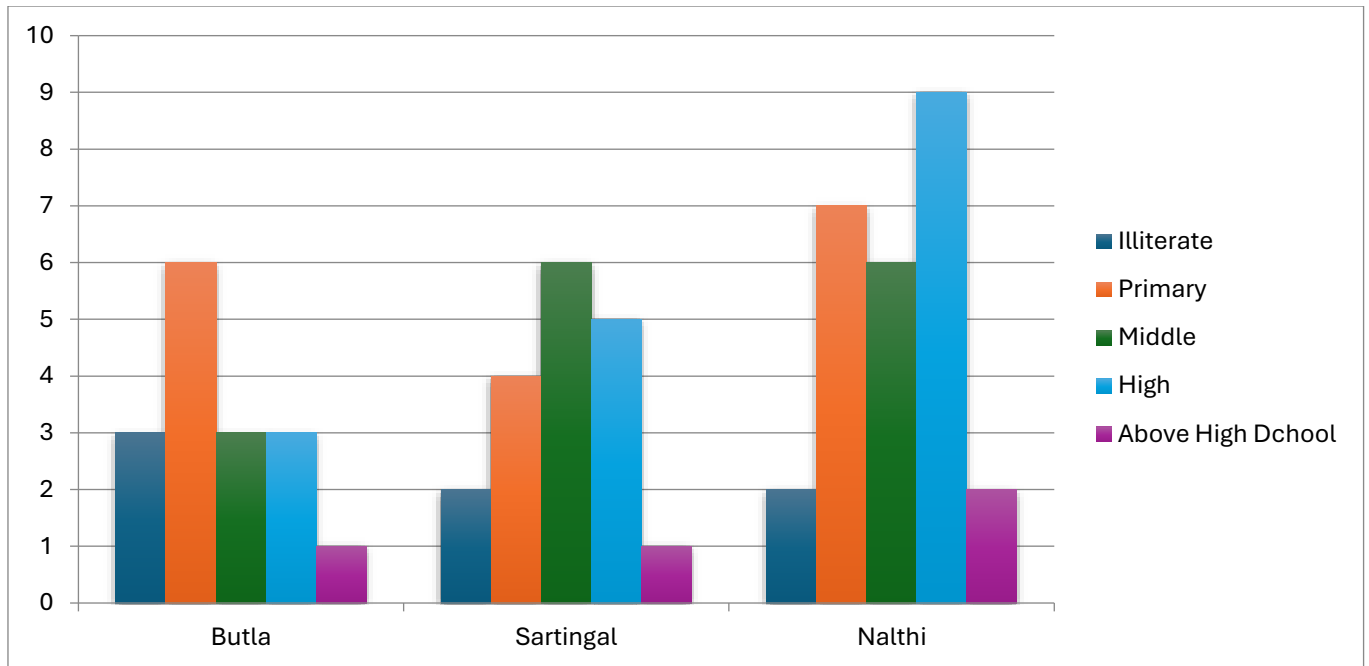


The analysis of table 3 from the study of 40 sample households reveals a significant gender disparity in NREGA-related employment. Out of the total workers, only 16 are female, making up 26.6%, while the remaining 44 are male, constituting 73.3%. This disparity may be due to low awareness of the program among women. In village-specific data, Butla has the highest percentage of female workers at 37.5% (6 females) compared to 62.5% male workers (10 males). Sartingal has 22.2% female workers (4 females) and 77.7% male workers (14 males). Nalthi shows 23.07% female workers (6 females) and 76.9% male workers (20 males). The highest male participation is in Sartingal at 77.7%, while Butla has the highest female participation at 37.5%.

Table 3: Educational Level of respondents

Village	Illiterate	Primary	Middle	High School	Above High School	Total
Butla	3 (18.7%)	6 (37.5%)	3 (18.7%)	3 (18.7%)	1 (6.25%)	16 (100%)
Sartingal	2 (11.1%)	4(22.2%)	6 (33.3%)	5 (27.7%)	1 (5.5%)	18 (100%)
Nalthi	2 (7.6%)	7 (26.9%)	6 (23.07%)	9 (34.6%)	2 (7.6%)	26 (100%)
Total	7 (11.66%)	17 (28.37%)	15 (25%)	17 (28.3%)	4 (6.6%)	60 (100%)

Source: Field Survey 2023

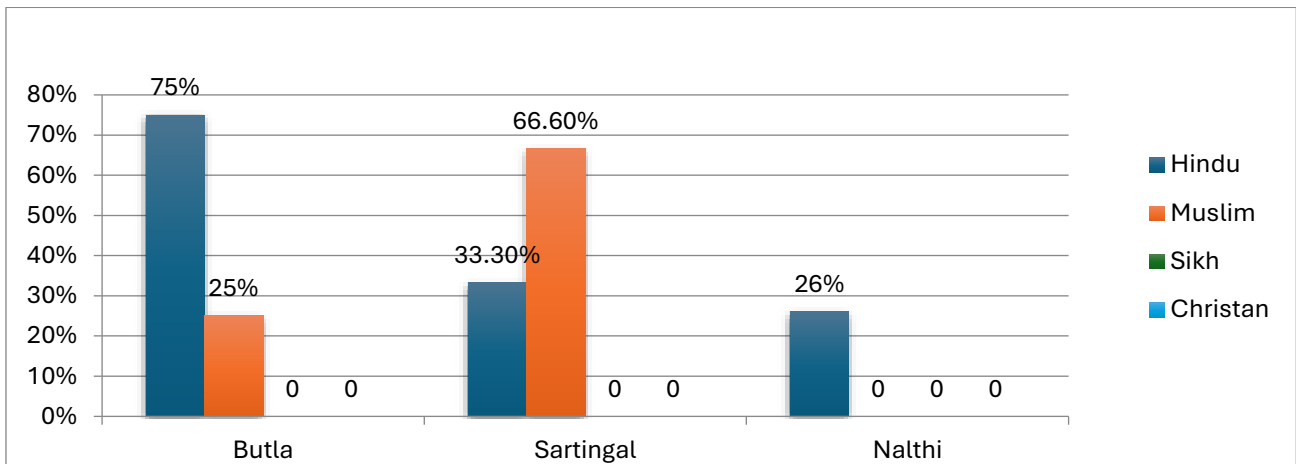


The table 3 highlights that education significantly impacts the employment opportunities within the study area, revealing that 11.66% of workers are illiterate, while a majority have education up to the high school level. The data shows variations across different villages: Butla has a higher percentage of workers with only primary education and fewer with high school education, Sartingal has a relatively balanced distribution with a notable proportion having up to middle school education, and Nalthi shows a diverse range with a higher percentage reaching high school and slightly above. The findings underscore the importance of skill development programs to enhance the employability of both literate and illiterate workers, suggesting that even educated individuals turn to MGNREGA for livelihood opportunities.

Table 4: Distribution of respondent’s religion wise.

Village	Hindu	Muslim	Sikh	Christan	Total
Butla	12 (75%)	4 (25%)	0	0	16 (100%)
Sartingal	6 (33.3%)	12(66.6%)	0	0	18 (100%)
Nalthi	26 (100%)	0 (0%)	0	0	26 (100%)
Total	44 (73.3%)	16 (26.6%)	0	0	60 (100%)

Source: Field Survey 2023

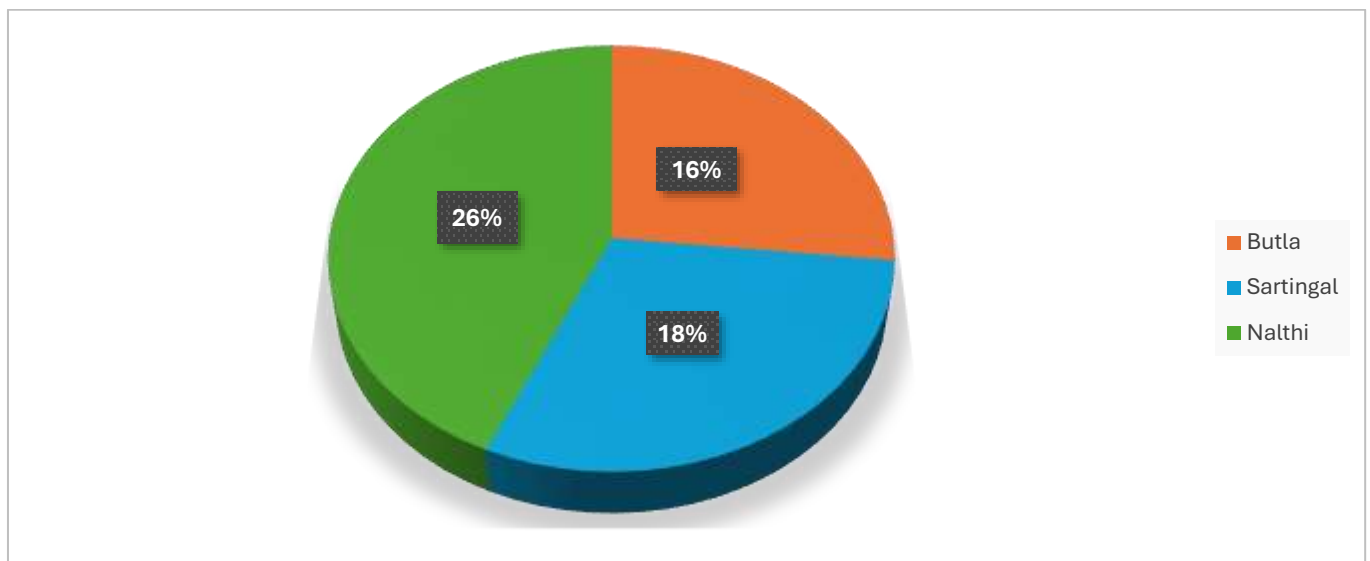


The data highlights the significant role of religion in rural development, reflecting how ideological differences impact decision-making and project implementation. According to Table 10, the majority (73.3%) of workers in the sample are Hindu, while 26.6% are Muslim. In specific villages, the religious composition varies: Butla has a predominantly Hindu workforce (75%), Saringal has a majority Muslim workforce (66.6%), and Nalthi's workforce is entirely Hindu. This distribution underscores the influence of religious affiliations on community dynamics and development processes.

Table 5: Source of Information & awareness about J&K MGNREGA

Village	Source				Total
	Gram Panchayat	Media	Gram	Rozgar Sahayok	
Butla	16 (100%)	0	0	0	16 (100%)
Saringal	18 (100%)	0	0	0	18 (100%)
Nalthi	26 (100%)	0	0	0	26 (100%)
Total	60 (100%)	0	0	0	60 (100%)

Source: Field Survey 2023



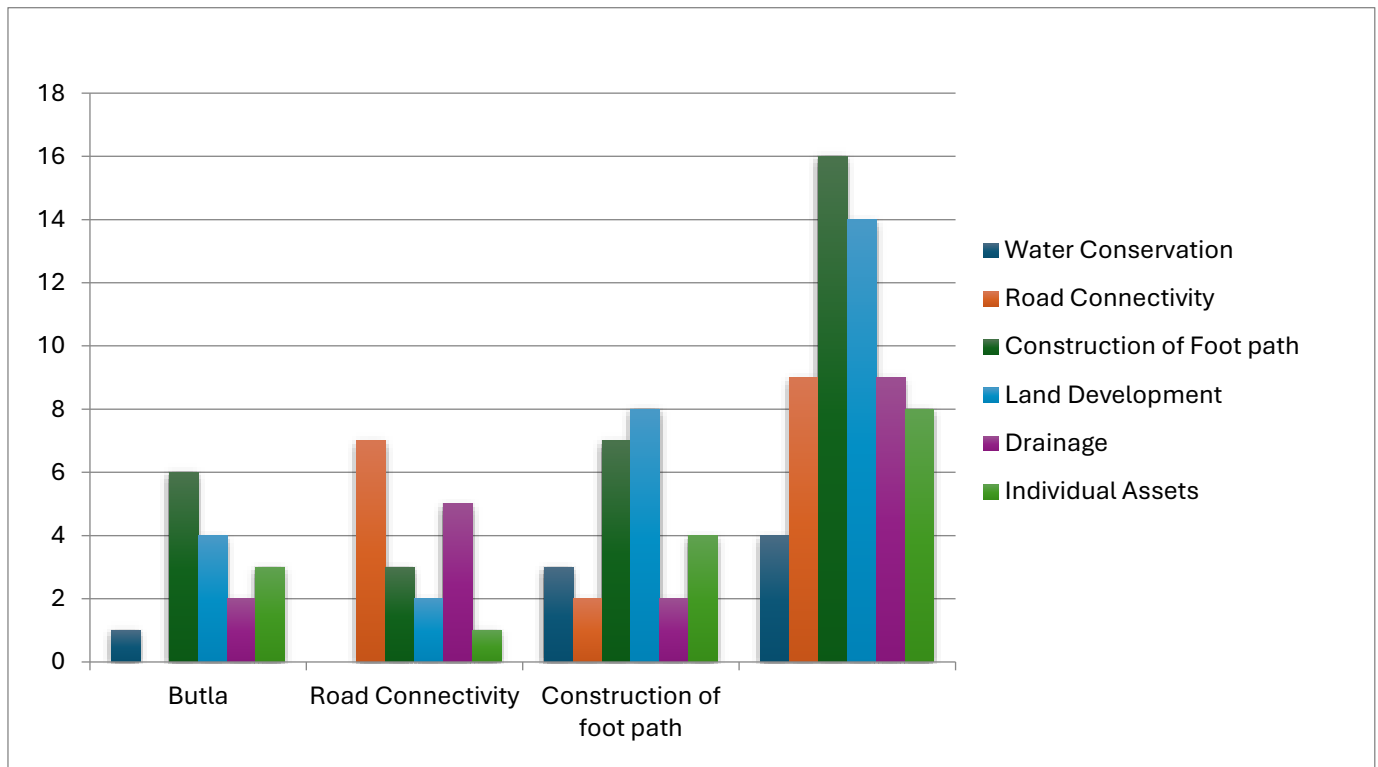
In rural areas, where communication infrastructure lags behind that of urban regions, ensuring that people are informed about their rights under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) is crucial. Effective dissemination of information in local languages is essential, covering key aspects such

as registration processes, application procedures, grievance redressal mechanisms, and the roles of various agencies involved. The data indicates that residents of Butla, Sartingal, and Nalthi rely almost exclusively on their Gram Panchayat for information about the MGNREGA, suggesting a significant gap in awareness through other channels.

Table 6: Number of works allotted to MGNREGA workers

S.No	Name of work	Villages			Total No. of respondents	Percentage
		Butla	Sartingal	Nalthi		
1	Water Conservation	1	0	3	4	6.6%
	Road Connectivity	0	7	2	9	15%
3	Construction of foot Path	6	3	7	16	26.65%
4	Land Development	4	2	8	14	23.3%
5	Drainage	2	5	2	9	15%
6	Individual Assets	3	1	4	8	13%
	Total	16	18	26	60	100%

Source: Field Survey 2023



INTERPRETATION:

Table 12 illustrates the distribution of work assigned to workers under the NREGA scheme across three villages: Butla, Sartingal, and Nalthi. The data shows that workers are involved in various tasks such as water conservation, road construction, footpath building, land development, drainage maintenance, and individual asset management. Specifically, approximately 6.6% of workers are engaged in water

conservation, 15% in road construction, 26.65% in footpath construction, 23.3% in land development, 15% in drainage maintenance, and 13% in managing individual assets.

Table 7: Percentage of Job card holders and number of days after which the respondent got job card after registering applications.

Villages	Indicator Possession of Job card	No. of Days		Total
		Within 15 days	After 15 days	
Butla	18	5(26.3%)	11(68.75%)	16(100%)
Sartingal	28	3(11.5%)	23(88.5%)	26(100%)
Nalthi	26	15(83.3%)	3(16.6%)	10(100%)
Total	72	23(38.3%)	37(61.6%)	60(100%)

Source: Field Survey 2023

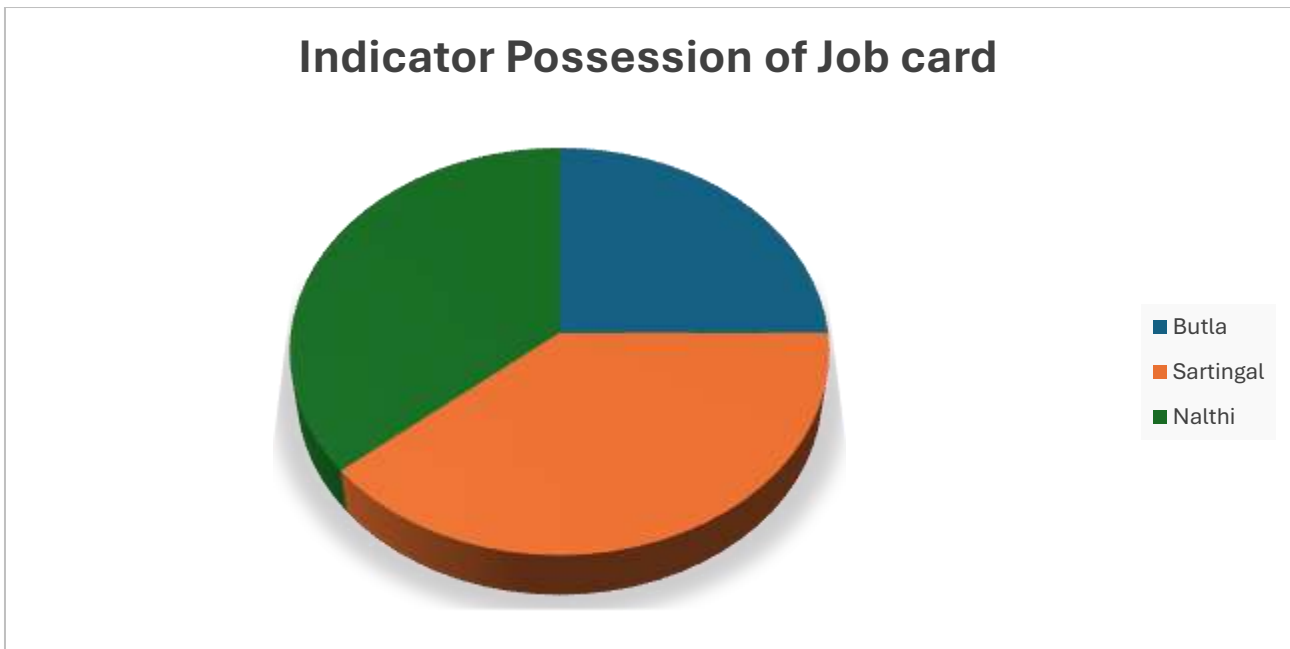
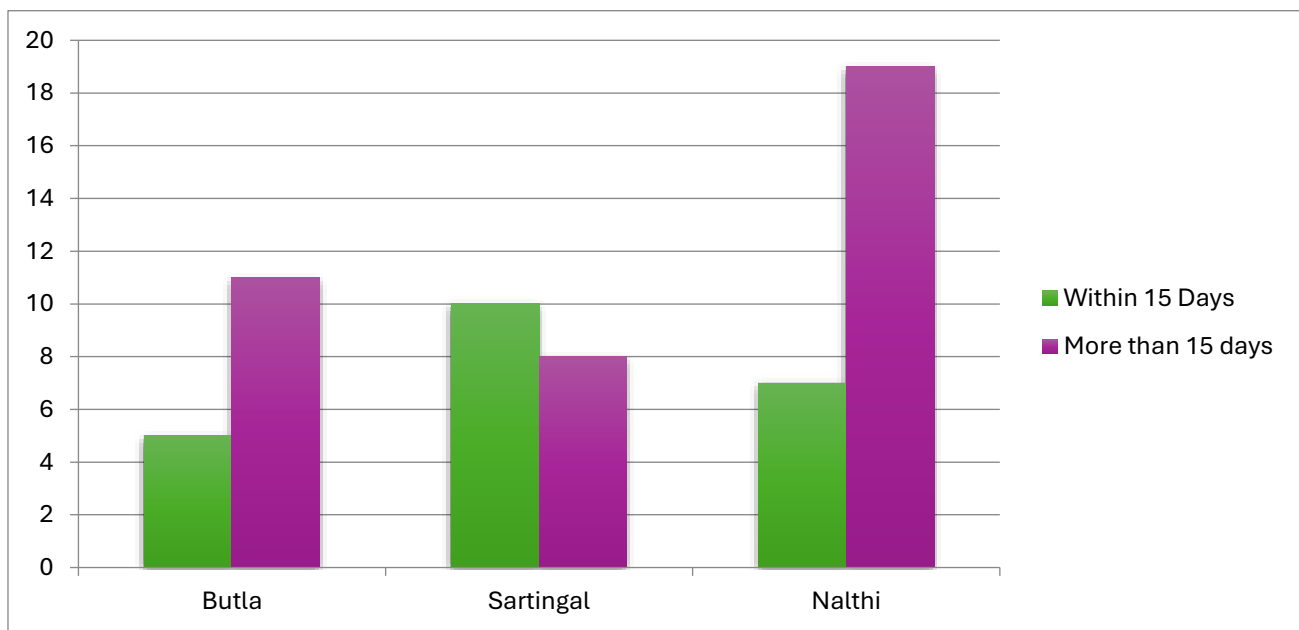


Table 13 illustrates the distribution of respondents with job cards and their access to work within 15 days of application. Job cards, issued by the gram Panchayat, are essential legal documents that should be provided within a fortnight after application and are valid for 5 years. In the event of loss or damage, duplicates can be issued, and grievances about non-issuance can be addressed to the Programme Officer or the designated grievance redressal authority at the block or district level within 15 days. The table indicates that 100% of respondents possess job cards. However, only 38.3% of respondents received work within the stipulated time frame, while 61.6% did not. Specifically, in village Butla, 26.3% received work within 15 days, whereas 68.75% did not. In Sartingal, only 11.5% received work in the stipulated time, with 88.5% receiving work later. Nalthi had a similar percentage as the overall study area, with 38.3% receiving work on time and 61.6% receiving it later.

Table 8: No. of days after which the respondent got work after applying for work and distance of worksite from native villages.

Village	No. of Days		Distance Between village and Worksite			Total
	Within 15 days	More than 15 days	2 km	2-5 Km	More than 5 Km	
Butla	5 (26.3%)	11 (68.75%)	16 (100%)	0	0	16 (100%)
Sartingal	10 (55.5%)	8 (44.4%)	10 (55.5%)	7 (38.8%)	1 (5.5%)	18 (100%)
Nalthi	7 (26.9%)	19 (73%)	20(76.9%)	6 (23%)	0	26 (100%)
Total	22 (36.6%)	38 (63.3%)	46 (76.6%)	13 (21.6)	1 (1.6%)	60 (100%)

Source: - Field Survey 2023



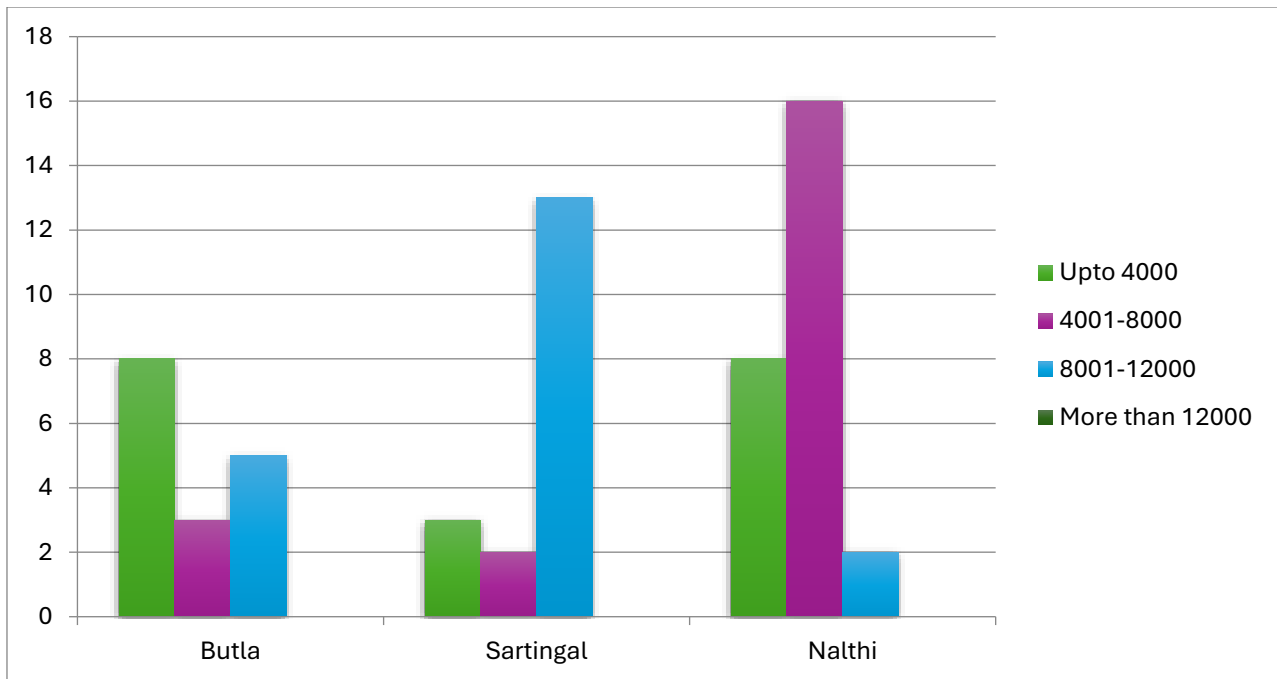
In accordance with the scheme provision, registered individuals holding job cards should receive employment within 15 days of their application. However, Table 14 indicates that only 36.6% of respondents in the study area secured work within this timeframe, while 63.3% experienced delays. Despite this, the scheme ensures that all rural households receive work within a 5 km radius of their village, with 76.6% of workers finding employment within 2 km. In Butla, only 26.3% of workers received timely employment, with 68.75% experiencing delays; all workers in Butla were within a 2 km radius of their worksite. In Sartingal, 55.5% received timely work, with the remainder receiving it later, and 55.5% worked within 2 km of the site while 38.8% travelled 5 km. In Nalthi, just 26.9% of workers got timely employment, with 76.9% working within 2 km, and the rest within 5 km.

Table 9: Annual income of respondent has increased while working under MGNREGA

Village	Income				Total
	Upto 4000	4001-8000	8001-12000	More than 12000	

Butla	8 (50%)	3 (18.7)	5(31.25%)	0	16 (100%)
Sartingal	3 (16.6%)	2 (11.11%)	13 (72.2%)	0	18 (100%)
Nalhi	8 (30.7%)	16 (61.5%)	2 (7.9%)	0	26 (100%)
Total	19 (31.6%)	21 (33%)	20 (33%)	0	60 (100%)

Source: Field Survey 2023

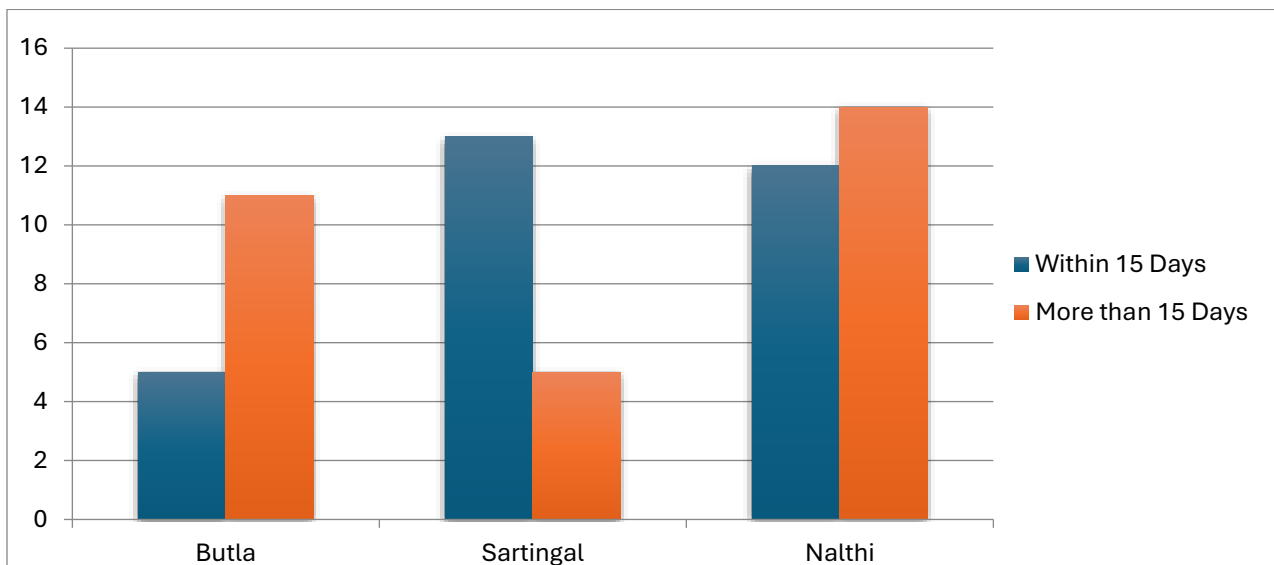


Under the scheme, workers are entitled to a minimum wage set by the state, with equal pay for men and women. In Jammu and Kashmir, the minimum wage for NREGS workers is 179. Data indicates varying income levels among respondents: 31.6% earn up to 4000, about 33% earn between 4001-8000, and 33% earn between 8001-12000. Specifically, in village Butla, 50% of respondents earn up to 4000, 18.7% earn between 4001-8000, and 31.25% earn between 8001-12000. In Sartingal, 16.6% earn up to 4000, 11.11% earn between 4001-8000, while 72.2% earn between 8001-12000. In Nalhi, 30.7% earn up to 4000, 61.5% earn between 4001-8000, and 7.9% earn between 8001-12000.

Table 10: Number of days after which wage are received.

Village	No. of Days		Total
	Within 15 Days	More than 15 days	
Butla	5 (31.25%)	11 (68.75%)	16 (100%)
Sartingal	13 (72.2%)	5 (27.7%)	18 (100%)
Nalhi	12 (46.15%)	14 (53.8%)	26 (100%)
Total	30 (50%)	30 (50%)	60 (100%)

Source: Field Survey 2023



Under J&K NREGS, wages must be paid within 7 to 15 days. Table 16 highlights wage payment patterns: 50% of workers receive wages within 15 days, while the remaining 50% do not. In village Butla, 31.25% receive wages on time, and 68.75% do not. In Sartingal, 72.2% receive wages on time, whereas 27.7% do not. In Nalthi, 46.15% receive wages within the stipulated time, and 53.8% do not.

1.6. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Summarizing the micro level study that is status of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Scheme (MGNREGA) in the three villages of Bharderwah tehsil i.e. Butla, Sartingal and Nalthi we would like to remark that the status of scheme is satisfactory but in certain aspects it is not up to the mark. There are issues related to issuance of Job Cards, late payments of wages, not timely allotment of work after applying for work, no adequate funds, small proportion of workers who are without job cards, no guarantee of allowances in case of work is not provided within the 15 days after applying for work, lack of awareness about the various provisions of the scheme and so on. Thus, in order to tackle all these issues which create hindrance in the effective implementation of the scheme of NREG in J&K following suggestion may be recommended:

1. Ensure that information about the scheme, including registration, application processes, and grievance procedures, is communicated in clear and simple language through local languages to reach a wider audience effectively.
2. Appoint a dedicated Programme Officer for the administration of the scheme, rather than assigning this role to a Block Development Officer who cannot commit full-time, to ensure better management and execution of the scheme.
3. Establish a robust system for inspecting the implementation of works at various administrative levels to ensure compliance and quality.
4. Provide unemployment benefits if work is not assigned within 15 days of the application to address delays and support workers.
5. Introduce special provisions and concessions for physically challenged individuals to support their participation in the scheme.
6. While there is a registration and job card issuance system in place, address existing issues to streamline and improve the process.

7. Enhance awareness about the NREGA (National Rural Employment Guarantee Act), RTI (Right to Information) Act, and other related aspects. Ensure workers are informed about job cards, work provision, and payment delays, as increased awareness has positively impacted scheme performance, despite issues such as lack of job cards and additional costs to workers.

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