

Dalit women face discrimination even in MGNREGS, says study

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Panchayats refuse them jobs because of 'untouchable' tag

Dalit women face discrimination even when they go looking for jobs under the government's flagship rural employment guarantee scheme, according to a study.

Gram Panchayat members implementing the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) often refuse to provide jobs to Dalits because of the unfortunate "untouchable" tag. They are also discriminated under the government-run schemes of pension for widows, maternity benefits and medical support.

The observations figure in an almost completed study on oppression of Dalit women, being conducted across states by NGOs like Sathi All for Partnerships (SAFP), Consult for Women and Land Rights, National Conference of Dalit Organisations and Nirman Mazdoor Panchayat Sangathan. The findings will be presented to the Ministry of Women and Child Development for action to curb discrimination against Dalit



women. "The main agenda of this study is to analyse community issues and provide resources like infrastructure, material and solutions at the grass-roots level to Dalit women," said Shivani Bhardwaj, a SAFP member. The study says 60 per cent of Dalit women are dependent on occasional employment, 86 per cent are landless and only 30 per cent are literate.

Dalit women lose out when looking for work as housemaids, milk or vegetable sellers due to the widespread notion of "impurity" associated with their status. According to

the study, around 85 per cent of Dalit women work in the agricultural sector, which



is unorganised.

Child labourers“Even children are not spared as 21 per cent of all girl children from Dalit communities are child labourers,” said Meera Velayudhan, an analyst on gender and culture. Experts believe if Dalit women take part in their neighbourhood meetings, they could propose a viable plan for village development. For instance, 40-year-old Durga Garg, who lives in Dera Mandi village, Delhi, shared her views on the design of the house she has got under Indira Awaas Yojana. “The house does not have a toilet, no kitchen and no doors to ensure safety of women,” she said. Durga believes Dalit women in her area can propose better designs for homes than those under government schemes. Once the study is completed, representatives will present the recommendations to the government for better implementation of existing schemes. Recommendations are expected to include focusing on economic empowerment in Dalit discourse and increasing allocations for enterprises by Dalits and women in finance and development corporations.