Chapter-1

INTRODUCTION

The concept of livelihood strategy has become central to development policies, programmes and practices in recent years throughout the world. Livelihood is a set of economic activities, involving self-employment and/or wage-employment by using one’s endowments (human and material) to generate adequate resources (cash and non-cash) for meeting the requirements of self and the household, usually carried out repeatedly and as such become a way of life. Government of India has been one of the largest agencies involved in such livelihood promotion efforts to enhance living conditions of its people. Livelihood project is a strategy to enable the rural people to gain more economic values, improve production system and social justice. Hence, Govt. of India implemented various rural development programmes including Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). The present study is intended to analyse the structure and functioning of MGNREGS in Kerala and how far it helped to enhance the rural livelihood.

India, the land of cultural diversities and the emerging power in the world financial map faces a large number of challenges. Even though the per capita income is at national level, the villages have not been empowered properly. Most of the villages are suffering from penury and inequalities. The fundamental inequalities in livelihood security, in the basic necessities like food, shelter and clothes, pave the way for impoverishment among rural population. Furthermore, the environmental effects of poverty, for example deforestation, declining land productivity, soil erosion and others have negative effects on providing rural livelihood security. The density of population always creates problems in all rural areas. Researchers have described the distribution of income among households in rural areas as the most unequal in the country. The villagers find it very difficult to make both ends meet (Datta and Sharma, 2012). Even among geographical regions, poverty and inequality between rich and poor is apparent. It means that there is a great gap between the plebeian and patrician.
Most of the rural households depend on agriculture and livestock management for their livelihood. Both these things help the villagers much to weave their dreams for a better future. Caste and Religious systems are rigid in the rural areas. As we know, casteism is one of the six major issues faced by India. Caste and occupation based classifications are seen in each and every part of rural India.

Livelihood security is dependent upon a number of activities and strategies undertaken by Indian rural people to generate income. Some of the livelihood strategies are wage labour, social pension, remittances from household members working in urban area, unpaid domestic and farm labour and illegitimate activities. All these different strategies have helped them, from time to time, to live a comfortable existence in the society. Rural livelihood in India is complex because of a number of activities and strategies involved in generating it. In rural India, agriculture is considered as an integral part of rural livelihood. So far, it has contributed much to the financial scenario of the country. But access to other forms of income and to assets strengthens the distribution of resources within the household.

In the present century, livelihood deserves special mention; especially in the background of high population explosion. A livelihood comprises people, their capabilities and their means of living, including food, income and assets. Tangible assets are resources and stores, and intangible assets are claims and access. A livelihood is environmentally sustainable when it maintains or enhances the local and global assets on which livelihood depend, and has net beneficial effects on other livelihoods. A livelihood is socially sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stress and shocks and provide for future generation. Thus, it is very evident that livelihood is both environmentally and socially sustainable.

Rural people in India in general and especially those from the backward region and sections are most vulnerable to livelihood security. The poor out of sheer survival necessity are forced to exploit natural resources in non sustainable manner and thereby enlarge their vulnerability further. Most of the rural Indian households are dependent upon agriculture and farm related activities for their subsistence. As far as they are concerned, agriculture is their mammon.
The incidence of poverty in rural India is directly related to prevalence of unemployment and under employment on a large scale. Majority of the rural population is land less and sustains entirely on wage employment. While the self employment programmes are intended to remove poverty on a sustainable basis, there is need to take care of the wage employment needs of the rural poor. The rural workforce continues to suffer due to excessive seasonality of employment, lack of wage employment opportunities and low wage rates. Migration of labour, discrimination between wages paid to men and women, distressed child labour etc. are therefore, common features of rural areas. An effort to provide wage employment, as a short-run strategy for alleviation of rural poverty has been a major component of development planning in India. The major programmes under implementation in this direction are the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) and Employment Assurance Schemes (EAS). The Million Wells Scheme (MWS) is also one such programme of employment on land based activities.

The Government conducted a study about unemployment among rural people. It was estimated that India needed lakhs of jobs in the coming years. But the latest National Sample Survey indicates a reduced unemployment rate in rural India. The increasing number of self-employed is decreasing the overall unemployment rate in the last five years, which is rather a pointer to the crisis. The employment scarcity is pushing rural people to petty self-employment with low and uncertain income. If this issue is not addressed poverty, the consequences of poverty will be serious (Centre for Science and Environment, 2010).

According to the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO)’s 61st round of nation-wide survey, unemployment rate has come down as more and more people are becoming self-employed in rural areas. Thus the real meaning and dimension of unemployment is getting changed day by day. For an economy this should have been usually good news. But for India the news is not that heartening. Analysis of the data suggests that the rise in number of self-employed people in rural areas is more to do with lack of regular job availability than of economic well-being. Self employment among the people cannot be considered as real wellbeing. Its scenario is something different. Regular employment scarcity is forcing people to take up low productive and uncertain self-employment options.
The period (1999 – 2005) showed an overall employment growth to 2.8 per cent. But the average daily status unemployment rate, which had increased from 6.1 per cent in 1993-94 to 7.3 per cent in 1990-00, increased further to 8.3 per cent in 2004-05. Currently this rate is around 9 per cent. It indicates that many people are not getting regular employment. It is clear that India has not been able to meet the employment demand. Thus despite the overall employment growth there is a huge number of unemployed. The population of the working age group is also increasing in an alarming proportion within its consequences the demand and supply scenario.

The situation is worse for rural areas, which accounts for 74 per cent of India’s unemployed population. Thus, it has been estimated that the rural areas are more prone to this problem. Close to 80 per cent of employment in rural areas come from agriculture sector (Economic Review, 2010). According to Planning Commission estimate based on the 61st NSSO data, the Economic Census of 2005 and the annual account of industry, agriculture employment has increased at less than 1 per cent per annum during 2000-05. It also points to an unprecedented rise in unemployment among agricultural labour households that account for major chunk of India’s chronic poor scattered in the 200 backward districts: it has increased from 9.5 per cent in 1993-94 to 15.3 percent in 2004-05.

The NSSO conducted a survey throughout India (in 28 States and 7 Union Territories). The findings are not favourable. They show the great decrease in agricultural production. At national level, the number of rural people employed in agriculture per 1000 persons has come down from 763 in 1999-2000 to 586 in 2004-05. Agriculture’s employment share has come down to 74.9 per cent from 78.4 percent in 1999-2000. Though there has been a slight recovery in the annual rate of growth of agricultural employment during 2000-2005 from 0.03 to 0.83 per cent, this increase is not enough to meet the demand (Centre for Science and Environment, 2010). If the situation continues like this, gradually the grain growth may come down. Finally, it will affect the total food security of the nation.

The problem is that the decline in employment has not been supported by proportionate increase in non-agricultural employment. The share of manufacturing employment has not gone up commensurately for rural male workers. Instead the
more noteworthy shift for rural males has been to construction, with some increase in
the share of trade, hotels and restaurants. Add to it the puzzling data about significant
decline in wage employment in general: from 45 percent during 1999-2000 to around
42 per cent during 2004-05. These decreases means a large section of people are
displaced from agriculture as well as many people are not even seeking daily wage
jobs. Where are they? How are they employed? Do they remain unemployed?.

The characteristics of the work force in India are discussed here. It indicates
that this change is distress driven. Out of the total population of 10,960 lakhs,
according to the Ministry of Labour and Employment, 4,690 lakhs constitute its
workforce. Ninety per cent of the workforce is in the unorganised sector. Over
70 per cent of the labour force is illiterate and/or educated below the primary level.
Around 1400 lakhs casual workers constituting about 30 per cent of the work force
do not have regular source of work or income. These are the people who are now
turning into self employed.

Table 1.1 Selected indicators of Human Development Index in India and Kerala
State.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.No</th>
<th>Particulars</th>
<th>India</th>
<th>Kerala</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Human Development Index Rank</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Total population</td>
<td>1,028,737,436</td>
<td>31,841,374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sex ratio</td>
<td>933</td>
<td>1058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Literacy rate</td>
<td>64.8 %</td>
<td>90.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Life expectancy at birth (2002-06)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>62.6</td>
<td>71.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>64.2</td>
<td>76.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>65.4</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>IMR (Per 1000 live birth)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Birth rate per 1000</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Death rate per 1000</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India 2011, India Human Development report 2011.
Table 1.1 shows the selected indicators of HDI for India and Kerala. From the Table it is found that the indicators of Kerala are very different from all India pattern, especially in life expectancy and health indicators. Table 1.2 shows indicators related to work and employment status. It is found that productive employment and decent work are key elements to achieve the reduction of poverty. The ILO has developed four strategic pillars; job creation, rights at work, social protection, social dialogue and gender equality. Like HDI in Work Status also Kerala shows a different trend when compared to the general national pattern.

Table 1.2 Selected Indicators of Work Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.no</th>
<th>Particulars</th>
<th>India</th>
<th>Kerala</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Total Workers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>275014476</td>
<td>7765645</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>127220248</td>
<td>2518242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Non Workers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>257142296</td>
<td>7702969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>369223308</td>
<td>13854518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Main Workers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>240147813</td>
<td>6460693</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>72857170</td>
<td>1776280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>313004983</td>
<td>8236973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Marginal Workers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>34866663</td>
<td>1304952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>54363078</td>
<td>741962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>89229741</td>
<td>2046914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Cultivators (per cent)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Agriculture Labours (per cent)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Household Industry Workers (per cent)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Other Workers (per cent)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>75.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>66.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>73.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India 2011, India Human Development report 2011.
1.1. Profile of Kerala State

Kerala is considered as one of the well-developed States in the country. Kerala’s high standard of living, high literacy rate and other characteristics make it, very conspicuous among other states. It has acquired a mammoth growth all through and has attracted considerable level of foreign investment (Narayanasamy, et al., 2010). Industries have prospered and the service sector is booming. Apart from the booming economy, the state also has an impressive record in terms of social sector achievements. Public Distribution System is one among the best in the country.

Census 2011 had put Kerala’s population at 3,33,87,677 consisting of 1,60,21,290 males and 1,73,66,387 females. The population density is about 859 people per sq.km, three times the national average. Kerala is one of the densest states in the country and it recorded a decadal population growth of 9.43 percent. Kerala, with a sex ratio (female per 1000 males) of 1084, is the only state with a positive figure. Child population in Kerala the age group of 0-10 which stood at 37.93 lakh in 2001, declined to 33.22 lakh in 2011.

Kerala has achieved the distinction of having the lowest dropout rate among school students in the country. So the State has achieved the highest position in the literacy rate. The literacy rate of the State has nearly doubled from 47.18 per cent in 1951 to 93.91 per cent in 2011 census. The profile of literacy in the state throws up interesting trends. Of course, male literacy has been quite high, it being as high as 97.90 per cent in census 2011. But, unlike in many other states, literacy among women has been quite high, as much as 91.98 per cent. It reflects a healthy social status being enjoyed by women in the state.

Kerala enjoys a unique position in the health map of India. The health indicators in Kerala are at par with the western world. It has the lowest infant mortality and maternal mortality rate and the highest life expectancy in the country (Table 1.1). Although economically poor by Indian standards, the achievements measured by Human Development Indicators in Kerala present a paradox when posed alongside the poor economic development measured by household consumption expenditure.
Kerala State which had a low base in food production in the country continued to face serious challenges in retaining farming area and improving production and productivity of important crops. The provisional estimate of agricultural income of the state recorded a negative growth of 1.79 per cent in 2009-10. Quick estimate for 2010-11 also indicated a decline of 0.78 per cent in growth over 2009-10. The share of agriculture and allied sector in Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) similarly indicated a fall. The share was 17.48 per cent in 2004-05 and declined to 10.59 per cent in 2010-11. Kerala agricultural economy has been undergoing a structural transformation since the mid-seventies by switching over a large proportion of its traditional crop area devoted to subsistence crop like rice and tapioca to more remunerative cash crops. The area under cultivation has been declining consistently over the last several years.

The state has however, a large population suffering below the poverty line. Though it has managed to reduce the number of poor people over time, it still has a considerable number of poor. While the conventional indicators of economic growth like the rate of growth of the economy suggests that it has maintained a scorching pace, the growth process has completely left behind a vast majority of its population. To add to their woes, the primary sector, the largest employer of the rural people and the provider of livelihood, has either stagnated or declined over time. There are numerous reasons for such a decline and stagnation. Such a poor performance of the primary sector has a direct bearing on the livelihood of the people. So, the strategies of the development of the society should be restructured. Only then the development graph of the state will improve.

In Kerala, the two dimensions of the rural households are agricultural and non agricultural. The poor in rural Kerala are identified and categorised as agricultural labourers, fisher folks and the tribals. These three categories possess a very hand to mouth living. Three quarters of the working members of the poor households are casual labourers. 44 per cent are engaged in agriculture and 31 per cent in non agriculture activities. The non agricultural activities mean fishing in coastal areas, coir and cashew processing, handloom and other traditional occupations (Kannan, 1995). The region where poverty is at its worst is the erstwhile Malabar region. Thus, poverty acts as a threat to the rural livelihood sustainability in this area.
The 45 percent of Kerala population below poverty line live in the four northern districts. They account for one third of the aggregate rural debt.

There are 222 fishing villages along the state’s 590 k.m narrow coastline covering 290 sq. km with a density of around 2652 persons making the villages resemble urban slums. Lack of basic facilities like housing, sanitation, safe drinking water and electricity indicate lower quality of life of the fishing community. Poor qualities of life when coupled with high occupational risk make the fishing communities all the more vulnerable (Kurien, 2000). Scheduled castes and tribes, which constitute less than 10 percent of the state population, located in inaccessible habitations, have a greater incidence of poverty like the fishing communities. On the lines of religion, the share of Muslims is equivalent to their share in the total population, while Christians account for only 14 per cent of the poor where their population share is around 20 per cent, Hindus other than scheduled caste and tribe have a lower share of 41 per cent as against 48 per cent share in the total population (Kannan, 1998). Socio political, cultural and economic inequalities make it difficult for the rural people to emerge from their poverty.

The combination of extreme poverty and limited or non-existent access to fertile agricultural land and other environmental resources results in few opportunities of poor grassroots actors to escape their dependent circumstances simply through hard work (in many case these actors are already working with maximum efforts). Levels of poverty were characterised by their ever increasing dependence on Common Poverty Resources (CPRs) and a common concern was that despite poor people’s knowledge of seasonal conditions, their ability to prepare themselves for the consequences were limited by their poverty. The end result was that marginalisation becomes a defining trait for most poor grassroots actors. Many of these grassroots actors are marginalized sections, women of poor households etc.

In Kerala today, the transformation occurring in the villages is far-reaching. Kerala was systematically incorporated into the world economy from the late 19th century. Colonial economies were specialized only in the export of raw materials and agriculture. After Independence, developmental status attempted to plan national economic development to diversify narrowly based export economies. The
Contributory factors included misconceived agricultural modernization projects, liberalisation policies in agriculture and the increasing population growth and commoditization in rural areas which manifested in problems of environmental and social reproduction. The effects of the crisis are felt on rural households especially the poor and rural marginalised, who depend entirely on agriculture for their livelihood.

Wayanad and Palakkad, are the two districts in Kerala where the highest concentration of marginalised and backward rural household is found. It is also the same districts in Kerala were the dismal stories about poverty, unemployment, loss of livelihood, etc are getting. So, as a particular and illustrative case the researcher is analysing the poverty alleviation programme, wage employment programmes and rural household relationship of Wayanad and Palakkad districts of Kerala. In this work the role played by wage employment programmes like MGNREGS are closely analysed and its impact on poverty alleviation and enhancement of rural households. Despite the limited scope for generalization, an in-depth analysis of a particular case would illuminate the nature of possible linkage between MGNREGS and rural livelihood.

1.2. The Need for Livelihoods Enhancement

The most serious problem the Indian rural society faces is poverty. The evils such as unemployment, under employment, low wage rate, agricultural reductions etc worsen the above mentioned predicament. The intensity of poverty prompts the rural people to be engaged in any sort of employments. Regrettably the people cannot attain employment in accordance with their skills and tests. So they migrate from their native land to urban areas to get better employment. Being left without the male member in a family the women and other infirm members come to have a feeling of insecurity. Besides, they also face financial crisis in the household (Nair et al., 2007).

Most of the rural people in India look upon agriculture as the back bone of their income. But now they can no longer depend on agriculture. People, who spend most of the time in agriculture, are disappointed with low wage rate. The production cost does not in tally with the yield, so naturally the farmers become reluctant to involve themselves in the field of agriculture. Another cause that retards the profit of
agriculture is low wage rate. The farmers who work in someone else’s field are not paid fairly. Population explosion also contributes much to the decline of the agriculture field. As a result of population explosion most of the fertile lands are being converted to house plots. Thus the rate of agriculture production decreases and the farmers become incapable of depending on agriculture for their livelihood. Consequently the rural people become engaged in other fields of works such as constrictions and small scale industries, even if they don’t get the wage corresponding with their works.

Agriculture which contributes less than 32 per cent to the GNP absorbs twice as much labour. The level of disparity between the standard of living of those working in agriculture and others is obvious. Farmers and farm labourers, on an average are half as well off as the others. The rural share dominates in farming, allied activities of forestry, livestock and fishing. Reduction in the agricultural production and in farm related activities directly attack rural household economy. The problem of poverty is a big challenge to rural areas of Kerala. The improvement of livelihood of rural community is one of the major issues in the economy of backward districts of Kerala like Palakkad and Wayanad. Poor economic status or lack of proper livelihood means creating serious problem. The rural community becomes more dependent on government-managed schemes like MGNREGS to fulfil their daily needs.

The need for the enhancement of livelihoods arises, because the current overall endowments of the factors of production, distribution of productive assets and productive abilities are grossly out of alignment with what is needed. The economy is not in a position to automatically generate livelihoods for all those who seek it. Our country has surplus labour power and also insufficient investible capital. A large proportion of the people who need to get work are uneducated, unskilled and without any capital. They can do any physical tasks with ease; they can lift and carry things, but they are not trained for much else. All these people and migrants from other countries are now in an age group that require livelihoods. The quality of livelihoods sought, also varies. Of these 160 million people, there are millions of youth in urban as well as rural areas who are literate but do not have saleable skills. The problem of livelihoods is thrown up clearly because, in the current organisation of the economy, there is insufficient productive work that can profitably engage the energies of the
surplus labour of this kind in the country. The emerging economic trends in the country do not show a very comfortable future on the livelihoods front. The situation regarding rural and urban livelihoods is shaped by several developments in the country. Many of these make the task of creating livelihoods an increasing challenge.

As the rural people do not have gainful livelihoods they have to confront vexations such as unemployment, poverty, starvation, illiteracy etc. These problems can only be eradicated by conferring upon them gainful livelihoods. Here lies the importance of the enhancement of livelihoods. It is clear that no other factor can improve all the aspects of a community – economic, social, cultural, educational, etc so much as money can. If the rural people are trained to make use of their skills, they will be in a position to meet their physical needs.

So the State should make very serious attempts to enhance the rural livelihoods. Steps should be taken to organise new governmental policies and programmes and to stimulate the already existing policies which enhance the economic and social sustainability of rural households. Since the family is the micro unit of the state the livelihood of each family should be enhanced. If the economic condition of this micro unit is improved it will gradually lead to the economic sustainability of the State. In order to know the shift from mere wage employment programmes to right base wage employment programme (MGNREGS) let us look at a retrospect of wage employment programme in India.

1.3. Wage Employment Programmes (A Retrospect)

India has three decades of experience in implementing employment generation programmes. To create employment opportunities to the public, through a scheme is not a new practice. The Maharashtra model of rural employment has existed since the 1970s. As far as the new MGNREGS is concerned, it has a lot of peculiarities like people’s entitlement, support by the law and mandatory in nature. Not much has changed in the form and substance of the public work programmes in the past 30-odd years. In many ways the MGNREGA is a replication of earlier schemes in letter and spirit, of course, with a legal guarantee. So past failures do haunt the MGNREGA (Gogana, 2007). So, this scheme badly needs a revamp. The first set of programmes, the National Rural Employment Programme and the Rural
Landless Employment Programme, began in the 1970s as clones of the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme.

The history of Wage Employment Programmes prominently starts with EGS in Maharashtra, which was initiated in 1972. The EGS got legal status after the passing of the EGS Act of 1977. This act provided legally framed, ‘Right to Work’ approach and assured sustainable livelihoods to the rural masses of Maharashtra. The EGS stated the prime objectives –(a) to provide gainful & productive employment to unskilled workers in the rural areas, (b) To create durable, productive assets or infra-structural resources that would help the villagers and farmers in their all round development, (c) To mobilize rural masses and seek their participation in development activities, (d) To empower rural masses to sustain in critical conditions like famine or flood, (e) To control rural to urban migration by giving them employment close to their villages, (f) To utilize manual labour power in such a way that it will reduce rural poverty and unemployment on one hand and help the capitalist development on the other (Acharya, 1990).

The Food for Work (FFW) programme was begun in the 1970s to make food grains available to poor landless households instead of work on public construction projects during the lean agricultural season. It was replaced in 1980 by the first large-scale rural wage employment programme, the National Rural Employment Programme (NREP). This combined the objective of creating gainful employment in rural areas with the creation of community assets for direct and continuing benefits to the poverty groups, and for strengthening rural community and economic infrastructure (Kannan, 1999). In addition, a Rural Landless Guarantee Scheme (RLGS) was started in 1983 with the objective of expanding employment opportunities for the rural landless by guaranteeing employment to at least one member of landless households for up to 100 days a year on projects for building community assets and rural infrastructure. Both programmes were merged in 1989 into the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY). The guarantee aspect of RLEGp was however, dropped with the merger. Main focus of JRY was to create assets. More emphasis was given for building roads and buildings. In recruiting participants, the preference was given to SCs and STs and freed bonded labour, while 30 percent of the employment opportunities are reserved for women. The Centre contributed 80
percent of the total outlay and made the States to contribute remaining 20 percent. District wise allocation of funds was on the basis of backwardness, which takes into account the proportion of rural SC and ST population and inverse agricultural production per agricultural worker, with equal weights (Rao, 2004). The District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) was given the charge of chief implementing authority along with Block Panchayat and Gram Panchayat (Ministry of Rural Development, 2008).

Again under the influence of EGS, the Employment Assurance Scheme (hence forth EAS) was launched in 1993 in pre-identified’ backward’ blocks located in drought-prone, desert, tribal and hill areas. The primary objective of the Employment Assurance Scheme was to provide gainful employment in manual work during lean agricultural seasons to all able bodied adults in rural areas who are in need of work, but cannot find it. The secondary objective is the creation of economic infrastructure and community assets for sustained employment and development. The scheme is designed to provide up to 100 days of assured manual employment at statutory minimum wages to each wage employment seeker in rural areas, subject to a maximum of two beneficiaries from each family. The EAS was demand driven. District authorities apply directly to central administration for funding, based on backwardness of blocks. Public works schemes like the JRY and EAS aim to provide gainful employment for poor households and contribute to the expansion of infrastructure and other social overhead capital in backward areas.

In the process of improvisation of EAS, its demand driven nature was changed and the scheme was finally universalized in 1997-98 to cover all the 5448 rural Panchayat Samities of the country. The allocation of (80 per cent) of funds to the states with its own share of 20 per cent was made more specific. The different blocks (Panchayat Samities) under EAS were categorized as A, B and C type for the purpose of release of funds. This categorization, to a large extent, reflected the degree of backwardness and the relative needs for generation of wage employment in different blocks. At the same time with the spirit of democratic decentralization, the Block Panchayats has been designed as the ‘Implementing Authority’ under the programme.
The Sampoorna Gramin Rozgar Yojana (SGRY) was merged in 2001 by amalgamating the JGSY (that is the newer version of JRY) and EAS. The main objective of the SGRY is similar to EGS and that is to provide additional wage employment, infrastructural development and food security in the rural areas. The States are required to meet 25 per cent of the cost, with the Central Government paying 75 per cent. The First Stream is implemented at a higher level. 20 per cent of total SGRY funds are allocated to elected District Councils (Zilla Parishads), and 30 percent to the lower, Block-Level Councils (Panchayat Samities). The other 50 percent of total funding - the Second Stream component - passes through the hands of district level authorities, the District Councils and the District Rural Development Agency, who distribute it among the lowest level elected Village Councils (Gram Panchayats) mainly on a per capita basis (Chathukulam, 2005).

Although SGRY do not provide right to work or law bound guaranteed employment, like EGS, it still has got enough potential to generate capabilities of the rural poor. For example – (1) Only productive works are permitted under the scheme. With a view to minimise the recurrence of drought in the State, it has been prescribed that moisture conservation and water conservation works should be given priority. Such works do affect the farm production in positive manner and also lead to the generation more agricultural employment (2) Wage payments are to be made partly in cash and partly in kind, at the same rate as the official minimum wage. These works provided an alternative and also raised the actual wages given to the farm workers. (3) Works shall be in rural areas and within a radius of 5 kms from the worker’s place of residence. (4) Workers have expected to be paid after maximum two week’s from the commencement of the work (Datt, 1996). It saves them from the cage of the moneylenders.

The open door economic policy, based on Liberalization Privatization and Globalization (LPG), has openly disowned policies like EGS for the simple reason that they are not productive. The idea of safety net and welfarism are becoming out of date. The lowest income groups who are most vulnerable to unexpected changes emerging out of LPG and who have least access to the benefits of LPG and insurance markets. Contrary to the prevailing socio-economic condition prevailed, out of high political interest and low social commitment expressed in the Common minimum
programme of UPA, the idea of National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (EGA) emerged in 2004. EGA has recently passed in both the houses and it has started in 200 districts of India. EGA is again not as a comprehensive EGS. It becomes much more diluted when it got approved and sometimes made even distorted. This Employment Guarantee Programme is limited to any one person from the family of the rural areas and again up to 100 days only. Still it has got many potentialities to handle issues of environment protection.

MGNREGA would go a long way towards protecting rural households from poverty and hunger. In fact, a full-fledged EGA would enable most poor households in rural India to cross the poverty line. Secondly, it would lead to a dramatic reduction of rural-urban migration: if work is available in the village, many rural families will stop heading for the cities during the slack season. Guaranteed employment would be a major source of empowerment for women. A large proportion of labourers employed under an EGA are likely to be women, and guaranteed employment will give them some economic independence. An EGA is an opportunity to create useful assets in rural areas. In particular, there is a massive potential for labour-intensive public works in the field of environmental protection: watershed development, land regeneration, prevention of soil erosion, restoration of tanks, protection of forests, and related activities. Guaranteed employment is likely to change power equations in the rural society, and to foster a more equitable social order. Finally, EGA is a unique opportunity to activate and empower the Panchayat Raj Institutions, including gram Panchayats and Gram Sabhas. It will give them a new purpose, backed with substantial financial resources.

In India today, capitalist development is in progress but at the same time the livelihood standards of the marginalized sections from the rural society is diminishing. Growth rate of agriculture is only about one per cent. Livelihood securities for the farmers are declining. Village based WEPs founded on safety net plus development plus empowerment will certainly help the rural masses in improving their livelihood and in turn strengthen environment protection and its enrichment.
1.4. Ideological Background of Wage Employment Programmes

The famous social thinker Page and his associate did not directly expect environmental concerns. However, the ideological background of Page was founded on Marxism and Gandhism. Both of these isms throw light on the broader aspects of environment, although they did not discuss environment issues directly in their ideologies. Marxist ideas of environment protection are linked with his general theories in relation to capitalism. The Marxists believe that man is a part of nature. But, he can go beyond nature. His creative abilities make him improve and enrich nature. The Marxists say human history is perpetual enrichment of nature. But man cannot do it only by dreaming. Firstly, he has to make nature as an instrument itself and secondly, he has to organize socially in order to frame disciplined action setup. Emancipating man from the non-egalitarian exploitative system is nothing but emancipation of nature. The antecedents of Marxist thought go further to say protection of environment is inevitable without growth, sustainability, equality, freedom from exploitation and social justice (Hunnigan, 1995). These interrelated aspects were seen as vital things to improve man and his environment.

Gandhian approach to environment, on the other hand, is based on his ideas of Gram-Swaraj, democracy (based on decentralization of power), self-sufficiency, and idea of sharing responsibilities of downtrodden by the rich people (expressed in trusteeship), empowerment of rural masses, poor and labour centred village development and so on (Desarda, 2006). The author quoted Gandhiji, “the earth has enough for everyone’s need but, not for the greed” and rightly considered the dictum as the edifice of the philosophy of sustainable and equitable development”. The above mentioned ideas and dimensions not only changed the vision of the development, but also its rudiments. The association of Mans with nature can be productive and that could become an instrument for development of the masses from rural sites and in turn development of entire society.

The EGS is a combination of both the ideas of Marx and Gandhiji. The EGS was the pioneer in the field of guaranteed wage employment programme. It covered and ensured right based, sustainable and planned protection towards development for the neediest sections of the village society. The tradition of ‘urban bias’ and rich
centered rural development programmes was replaced by EGS and other wage employment programmes. These programmes are basically framed to ensure social safety nets or livelihood security to the downtrodden and marginal sections of the rural population (Saxena, 2002).

EGS and other parallel wage employment programmes both at Maharashtra and all India level have got substantial potential to provide livelihood security through assuring

- Wage employment in adverse conditions and lean agricultural season
- Wages that would not only increase average income but provide hand to livelihood and also helps forest conservation by controlling grabbing fodder and firewood
- Minimum standard level of wages, equal to men and women
- Mitigation of seasonal migration from villages to cities
- Mobilization of the poor resulted in the process of demanding, getting and executing the works on the projects
- Empowerment of women
- Infrastructure development through soil and water conservation works
- Empowered self-rule through participatory democracy that would ensure equality and freedom from exploitation.

1.5. Role of MGNREGS in Livelihood Enhancement

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, which is a clear improvement over the earlier programs, now offers a fresh opportunity to reverse these trends and to rejuvenate the rural economy. Strengthening of the planning component under its implementation is therefore critical for the country. It needs to be noted that wage employment programs in general have come a long way from their historical origin as relief works organized for the poor in emergency situations caused by natural disasters or economic depressions and crisis. These
programs are also not seen merely as an instrument of consumption smoothing that gives the poor some support in the lean season of the year. In fact, these programs are now recognized in the literature as a modern instrument of general development policy, as they have shown tremendous potential to alleviate poverty as part of mainstream economic strategy (Tinbergen, 1994). That is, these programs have emerged as a tool that promotes strategic use of surplus manpower for promoting pro-poor growth leading to sustainable development.

The inclusion of the rights approach in this program, through the guarantee component of the Employment Guarantee Act, has strengthened the developmental role of the program through political empowerment of the marginalized poor that guarantees employment and wages to all those who demand it on the one hand and through massive employment generation by expanding the size of the program on the other hand.

What is needed, however, is strengthening of the planning component of the programs so that the short-term and long-term livelihood security for the poor can be achieved through the implementation of the employment guarantee scheme. This requires that:

- Labour-intensive works are planned for the needy poor, keeping in mind the demand for such works, to generate assets that promote development of the local/regional economy. That is, on the one hand, the right kind of assets are planned for promoting the development of the local/regional economy and on the other hand, they are taken up in a way that a continuous flow of employment is created for the local labour force that is likely to come forward to demand work.

- The assets are selected in a way that on the one hand they create ample employment avenues in subsequent rounds, and on the other hand they are social or common assets owned by the local community or the assets owned by the poor, and
The assets are maintained well and used productively to generate benefits that will be distributed equitably, with a focus on the poor including the socially excluded communities.

In 2005, India’s Parliament passed the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, which is the central government’s response to the constitutionally manifested right to work and a means to promote livelihood security in India’s rural areas. To this end, the Act guarantees 100 days of annual employment at statutory minimum wage rates to any rural household whose adult members are willing to do unskilled manual work. The manual work needs to create sustainable assets that promote the economic and infrastructure development of villages. The historic National Rural Employment Guarantee Act came into force on February 2, 2006 in two hundred (200) most backward Indian districts and later from April 1st 2008 onwards extended to cover all the districts in the country. The Kerala Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme came into force from February 5 2006, in two districts, Palakkad and Wayanad. As a public works program, MGNREGA uses a self-targeting mechanism to meet the first challenge. In fact, the program has been remarkably successful in this regard. More than half of its beneficiaries belong to Scheduled Castes and Tribes, and more than half are women (Nair et al., 2009).

The important feature of livelihood definition is to direct the links between assets and the options, people possess in practice to pursue alternative activities that can generate the income level required for survival (Ellis, 2000). Assets comprise a number of components: these are natural, financial, physical, human and social capitals (Chambers and Conway, 1992). In the functional basis, MGNREGS practices can play productive as well as protective role. The productive role of MGNREGS is providing demand based wage employment. This additional wage employment programme supports to ensure the livelihood in sustainable basis. The protective roles of NREGS are to create and improve the sustainable economic growth and creation of durable assets and ensure the food security. At the policy level, the role of MGNREGS has been adequately emphasized especially in poverty alleviation this is the national goal of the country.
Sensing the enormity and importance of the problem, the welfare state is planning to intervene and save its people from falling into the trap of poverty and also to rescue those who are already trapped in the vicious circle of poverty. The present study tries to throw a light on the livelihoods of people in the state.

In the Kerala rural situation, most reproductive and productive activities take place in the domestic sphere or household domain. Consequently, this study considers the household as a micro-level unit of analysis and action. Mainly focussed on NREGS as a project of livelihood strategic intervention and how it is associated with the living standard of people. An analysis of the rural household gives an insight into its basic structure and composition, basic needs, constraints, socio economic dynamics, vulnerability and coping strategies, household food security, access and management of resources. All these issues remain major concerns for the education system, rural development extension delivery systems and rural livelihood security. An understanding of the household and its processes is of great importance to policymaking and programme implementation of sustainable rural development. New approaches to understanding rural lives are needed to re-organise home economics are very essential. Therefore a study was undertaken to examine the importance of the household in rural livelihood security and also evaluate the role of wage employment programme and policies in rural livelihood enhancement.

1.6. Significance of the study

In India, majority of its population live in rural areas and are totally dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. Problems like poverty, unemployment, social and economic inequalities make the rural populations vulnerable. In ancient times the people of rural India were organized into self-sufficient, hard working, cooperative, happy village republics. The village system, however, was destroyed during the British regime and the rural masses became helpless and exploited. According to estimates of the Planning Commission for the Eleventh Five Year Plan, more than 10 million people in India will be seeking work every year. Thus, to ensure full employment within a decade, more than 10 million new livelihoods will have to be generated every year.
The study is significant for three reasons; the primary reason to promote livelihoods is the belief in the essential right of all human beings to equal opportunity. Poor people do not have life choices nor do they have opportunities. Ensuring that a poor household has a stable livelihood will substantially increase its income, and over a period of time, asset ownership, self-esteem and social participation. The second reason is to promote economic growth. The ‘bottom of the pyramid’ comprising nearly 4 billion out of the 6 billion people in the world, who do not have the purchasing power to buy even the bare necessities of life – food, clothing and shelter. But as they get steadier incomes through livelihood promotion, they become customers of many goods and services, which then promote growth. The third reason is to ensure social and political stability. When people are hungry, they tend to take to violence, crime.

The progress and the development of the country depend upon the conditions of rural folk. They act as the backbone in empowering our nation (Rao, 2004). Villages are the primary units that have to be paid more attention in the context of development. According to Gandhiji, ‘the soul of India lies in her villages’. So all the villages should be moulded in a way cater to the needs of this century. For the enhancement of rural people Government of India implemented National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. The main objectives of this scheme are reduction in rural poverty, employment generation on rural area, development of rural infrastructure, removal of regional imbalance, rural housing for rural poor and community participation etc. The household is the basic economic decision making unit in rural society. It is essential to understand householders’ livelihood strategies in order to make sense of what they are doing and understand how they perceive opportunities for change. In this context a critical examination of the goals of MGNREGS will give clear-cut picture about the effectiveness of the programme. It also gives a greater insight into the socio-economic development, food security of people, and social security especially in rural women.

India never can achieve the dream of full development without advancing the livelihood of the rural people. Ever since the implementation of Five Year Plan, the Government of India has paid attention in mapping policies and programmes which will be favourable for the rural people to advance their livelihood. The movement
taken by these policies and programmes are to be scrutinised. Through evaluation, the drawbacks and infirm areas of polices can be diagnosed. After this process, the problems can be removed and the quality of these governmental programme and policies can be ensured. So it is necessary to make a thorough evaluation of functioning and the effects of polices. The researcher is held with the prime objective to analyse how far MGNREGS has been supportive for the rural people in Kerala especially in Wayanad and Palakkad districts.

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