

## **Employment Guarantee Scheme as an Instrument of Social Change<sup>1</sup>**

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We present here the research conducted by the Department of Sociology, University of Pune that assesses the successes and failures of Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS) over the last forty years. This research goes beyond an evaluation of EGS in economic terms i.e. whether it reduces poverty, whether it is implemented properly and whether it caters to the target groups. We assess its role as an instrument of social change because we argue that it has three aspects in its design that makes it unique among all poverty alleviation schemes. These are a) the provision that work will be given on demand to all b) that this is a statutory right, protected by law and c) separate and autonomous EGS fund, accrued from taxes levied on urban professionals. These provisions we argue make EGS an instrument of social change. In these papers we examine the dynamics that makes this programme such an instrument.

Scholars (Acharya, 1990, Dev, 1995, 2001, Datar, 1986, Herring and Edwards, 1983, Gent, 1988) who have evaluated the EGS have argued that this programme has allowed for political mobilisation of the poor. However there has been little to no documentation and analysis of this mobilisation. Nor has there been any study, which examines the way these mobilisations have influenced the making of the Scheme. Additionally these mobilisations have ensured the introduction of specific provisions sensitive to issues such as workers' rights, and sexual division of labour, which has made this scheme distinctive, radical and popular amongst other poverty alleviation programmes. Also, these mobilisations have helped to implement this programme effectively. The papers that follow answer the question as to how mobilisations have designed the programme and how the programme has influenced the mobilisation of the poor. We also document the ways and manners through which new ideologies concerning the exploited, the landless, the tribal, the women and the dalit evolved during this period. We argue that when the mobilisations were strong, (until the mid-1980s) EGS was implemented effectively. However, in the late eighties these mobilisations declined. Why? How did this decline affect the way the scheme was implemented?

Secondly, Herring and Edwards (1983), make a new and different argument when they state that EGS has benefited the Kulak lobby. In the case of Maharashtra this means the Maratha elite who are predominantly from Western Maharashtra districts. Evidence shows that higher proportions of EGS works were sanctioned in these districts. These are rain fed districts and therefore EGS works in small irrigation works such as nullah bunding and tanks have sustained sugarcane farming of the Maratha elite. Additionally EGS has taken care of the surplus labour during the lean season (Dev, 2001). We ask in what circumstances and conditions did the Maratha elite involve themselves in the

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<sup>1</sup> These set of papers present the research done by a group of four young scholars, Anurekha Chari, Vishal Jadhav, Shaji Joseph and Sanjay Savale under my supervision, and in collaboration and with financial support from the Centre for Future State, a DRC with Institute of Development Studies of University of Sussex We would like to acknowledge comments and criticisms made by Mick Moore and Anuradha Joshi and the entire team at the Centre for Future State.

institutionalisation of EGS. What role did it play and how did this role influence the making of the scheme and its design such that it could serve their interests, as it has been suggested.

In order to answer this question, we trace the growth and gradual consolidation of the Maratha elite in the last five decades. We discuss how it used the cooperatives, panchayat system and the Congress party structures to consolidate its power and its constituencies. Existing elite consensus in execution of power through patronage structures was not extended in case of the EGS. We analyse the tensions among the elite in supporting this scheme and ask what external factors influenced its ultimate enactment. To answer this question, we analyse the nature of economic and social divisions among the Maratha elite, the conflicts between the State Congress party and the Congress party at the centre in the context of the split of the party by Indira Gandhi. Later we assess the changing nature of Maratha enterprise and elite ideology as some amongst them promote global trends in agriculture and influence change in EGS so that it caters to this new ideology and interests. At the same time other changes occur with the waning of the power of the Congress party and attempt by the Maratha elite to build cross party alliance with Bharatiya Janata Party and the Shiv Sena.

We ask, how did these developments affect the way the scheme was later reconceptualised and implemented? In this context what is the status of the scheme today? Given that its provision and administrative structure was conceptualised by the movements does it still retain its sensitivity to the needs of the poor? To what extent has it been able to continue to replicate the processes that it started out with? In order to answer this question, we trace the actors that have organised their interests around this scheme but also understand their interventions in terms of changing economic conditions in agriculture from the early seventies onwards till date.

This research analyses the contestations that have emerged in context to this programme in the last four decades as groups and classes have confronted each other in using this programme for their own respective interests. We reiterate that this has been possible only because the EGS has the above-mentioned features that make this programme distinctive and unique. We trace the growth and developments of these contestations in three phases. The first phase narrates the developments in the early seventies to the enactment in 1978. The second phase takes the story forward till 1988-90. In the last phase we record the post 1990 scenario.

In the following sections we discuss the three phases by initially looking at the severe drought conditions that led to the demand for relief and employment work in Maharashtra in the early seventies.

#### First Phase: Early 1970s to 1978

The droughts of 1970-73 affected almost eighty percent of the villages in the state, and about 15 to 30 million people out of a population of 50 million (Ladejinsky;1973,Omvedt 1975) and changed the situation to one of crisis. During the decade of 1961-71 the

agricultural growth in Maharashtra was 0.07% per annum, while the population grew at the rate of 2.7%. Consequently the condition of the agricultural labourers deteriorated. Rural areas experienced an acute shortage of food grains, drinking water and fodder, a situation that was exacerbated by hoarding and the subsequent increases in food prices.

The drought conditions, which included shrinking supply of food grains and rising costs of living, affected the sexual division of labour in Maharashtra. Not only did the women have to travel longer to find drinking water and fodder for themselves and their cattle but also with increasing male migration to cities and towns and to other villages where there were relief sites, they had to find employment support and sustain their families. This increased women's responsibility and vulnerability. No wonder, scholars analyzing the drought years have commented on the extensive number of women workers at the relief sites and assessed their problems (Omvedt, 1975, Brahme and Upadhaya 1979, 2004).

In 1970, the central government introduced food for work programmes all over Maharashtra. However, these attempts at providing relief were ineffective, as the reach of these programmes remained inadequate. In addition they were beset with corruption and other mal practices and also fostered discrimination based on caste as well as other identities. It was now recognized that the rural poverty reduction programmes would benefit from labour intensive employment programmes (Gadgil 1960).

In this context concerned citizens, both old and young (such as students) and intellectuals (like V.M.Dandekar) came together with activist groups, and opposition parties to form a committee called Dushkal Nivaran and Nirmoolan Samiti (Drought Relief and Eradication Committee) in 1971, to mobilise the people of the State against the drought and to demand that the State government launch a comprehensive drought relief programme. This committee provided a stage on one hand for like-minded individuals to come together and form new organisations such as Maharashtra Rajya Shetmajoor Parishad. Additionally, this committee provided a platform for discussion and debate on the political and economic conditions affecting the State and thus brought together politically disparate organisations, such as Yukrand and independent leftist political parties such as Lal Nishan Party to evolve a common agenda to fight drought and to reflect on alternate development programmes for agriculture in Maharashtra. This committee saw itself as a support group for other organisations, who were members of this committee and who mobilised the rural poor and demanded initiation of employment generation programme, known as the Page scheme in rural areas.<sup>2</sup> Finally, under pressure from various quarters the government introduced a drought relief programme called the Employment Guarantee Scheme on the lines of the Page scheme in 1972.

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<sup>2</sup> V.S. Page, a Congressman with socialist leanings became a member of the Legislative Council in 1961 and later the Chairman of the Council after the formation of the State on 1960. The EGS is sometimes also called the Page scheme because he had first conceptualised this programme and had pressurised the government to start it as a pilot project in Visapur village, Tasgaon block of Sangli district in early 1964. In 1969, this scheme was extended to 10 more villages within the block. (G.R., 1969)

We argue that the Guarantee Employment Programme was initiated as a result of the pressure created by people's mobilisation. In the subsequent papers, Shaji Joseph and Anurekha Chari document the way people's movements intervened to organise the drought relief programme. The lack of consistent and efficient response from the state led these movements to demand that a full fledged and permanent scheme and an Act be initiated to ensure that 'work on demand' be given as a right to the poor. Anurekha Chari and Shaji Joseph document the mobilisation by Maharashtra Rajya Shetmajoor Parishad, Shramik Sangathana and Yuvak Kranti Dal (Yukrand).<sup>3</sup>

These organizations mobilised workers to demand the expansion of EGS works. Once EGS was introduced as a scheme, the Parishad concentrated on mobilising the poor to demand the appropriate and timely implementation of the existing provisions of the scheme and their expansion to ensure proper working conditions for the rural poor. The main demands in this period included doubling of EGS wages, limiting working hours to 8 hours per day, providing a weekly holiday on Sunday, ensuring that work sites were restricted to a radius of 5 Km and that work begins immediately when 50 or more people demanded work.

In addition these organisations raised issues of nature of work and services related to drought relief work sites where a high number of women were present. While raising issues regarding rights of workers employed in drought relief work sites these organisations raised demands that had implications for rights of women workers and became important in the growth of feminist consciousness later.

These organisations wanted the government to ensure the equality of wages between women and men, and provision of social security, pension, dearness allowance, creches, access to potable water, shelter, maternity relief, and the issuance of identity cards. As the initial efforts for relief was done through contractors, it demanded that the state abolish this system, provide permanent employment to muster clerks, and extend EGS to forest work. They also sought the introduction of wages in kind through the use of food coupons. Additionally, in order to make the EGS administrative mechanism transparent, these organisations demanded that representation of recognized political parties at the Block level committee be made.

The sustained mobilisation of the poor together with the wide spread support given to the scheme by the opposition and significant sections within the State Congress party led the government to convert this scheme into an Act. The Act incorporated most of the demands, mentioned above, made by the movements and the organisations when it was introduced in the Assembly. However, one provision was also added that had repercussions on the implementation of the Act. Henceforth work was to be permitted on private lands. This provision would benefit the landed. In his paper, Vishal Jadhav examines how the landed and the political elite in Maharashtra, the Marathas, gradually

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<sup>3</sup> The Maharashtra Rajya Shetmajoor Parishad (henceforth the Parishad) was a rural trade union organization that was established by Lal Nishan Party (LNP). Shramik Sangathana was associated with an independent left group called Magowa and Yukrand was a student and youth group having socialist and left sympathies. See Joseph's paper for details.

came to support this programme and ultimately turned it into another institution for promoting patronage and its rule.

### Second Phase (1978-1988)

The declaration of the National Emergency in 1975, put paid to all political activity in India as also within the State of Maharashtra. Political movements and organisations, mobilising the poor, were forced to stop their activities to organise the exploited. Some of the leaders were arrested and imprisoned- However with the repeal of the emergency in 1977 and the passing of the EGS, political activity across the State was revived. Movements once again started organising the poor to demand work and ensure proper and efficient implementation of the Act. With the EGS now a law, the movements' goals changed. No longer were they interested merely in organising the poor to obtain work. They enlarged their scope of demands and objectives. Henceforth, mobilising for EGS became a means to develop and organise tribal, dalit and women movements in rural areas. Organisations assessed the specific nature of tribal, dalit and women's exploitation in Maharashtra. Political scientists have termed these movements and organisations Non Party Political Formations (NPPF) and argued that it construed a new phase in assessing the relationship between state and society in India.

Once the Act was passed, the NPPFs started pressurising the government to once again initiate EGS works, ensure timely payment of wages and extend it to all parts of Maharashtra. In addition they started organising the workers to ensure timely payments, equal wages for women and men and elimination corruption. Their goal was to ensure that all provisions of the Act were implemented. As mentioned above, over time, mobilisation around EGS provided these movements a ground to develop a structural critique of the state and its efforts to ensure development. These organisations wanted to know whether the state was sincere when it argued that development programmes benefited the poor. Was it autonomous of class, caste and gender interests? Or was it representative of these interests?

In the following papers, Shaji Joseph and Anurekha Chari have traced the growth and nature of the demands raised by organisations such as Shramik Sanghathana, which mobilised the tribal communities in Thane district. They show how its efforts to ensure effective implementation of the EGS Act soon incorporated new demands such as the effective implementations of land reforms. The recognition that tribal communities have faced land alienation led them to assess the history of land alienation since the colonial period and the role-played by colonial state and the post-independent state in perpetuating these trends.

Additionally, women activists of the Sanghathana raised the problems faced by tribal women, such as sexual division of labour in EGS works together with the domestic violence faced by them due to alcoholism among tribal men. The Sanghathana now traced the relationship between land alienation, indebtedness and domestic violence and assessed how patriarchal structures of power operating within the family were related to the question of land and colonialism. Alcoholism it seems was of recent origin. The Parsi

landlords who had usurped tribal land encouraged, illicit distillation of Mahua plant and encouraged its intake. Constant consumption of alcohol led to indebtedness and dependence on the landlord extending the spiralling cycle of exploitation of both female and male in different and connected ways.

Shaji Joseph documents the experiments conducted by Yukrand that had earlier restricted its activities in highlighting corruption in EGS works and discrimination on dalit workers in terms of wages and nature of work. Now, in Rashin Village of Ahmednagar district it inaugurated a new experiment that was later extended to other villages. EGS sites became the starting point of organising the dalit workers not only to ensure that caste discrimination in wages and nature of work does not take place but also to organise them to restructure the panchayat and ensure democratic participation of the dalit groups in the day-to-day panchayat decision-making. There was also an effort to imagine a new kind of village community based on co-operative labour irrespective of caste and work identity.

Anurekha Chari discusses another set of issues when she analyses the growth of Mukti Sangharsh and its demands around EGS. She shows how the organisation called for a redefinition of the notion of 'public works' when it demanded that employment generation should be done for wasteland development, rather than road construction or building nulahs that would help irrigate land of the landlords. Later when it mobilised women working in EGS works, it recognised that many of these were single women- separated, divorced or deserted. These women did not have access to their natal or affinal homes. EGS mobilisation was now organised into a movement for giving access to housing for single women.

These examples show how NPPFs had used the EGS to raise structural issues concerning exploitation of distinct groups of rural poor in Maharashtra. But these NPPF's political ambitions were constrained by their limited reach across the State. Unlike the early seventies, when drought and famine conditions introduced mobilisations across the State, in this phase, the mobilisations were restricted to certain areas and localities of the State. Additionally these movements had started facing repression and the police has started harassing the poor. The NPPFs recognised the need to align themselves in order to pool their resources and information regarding the workings of EGS and to build a State wide federation to confront the government on EGS as also other development programmes for the rural poor. They also wished to build a movement against the state in which the poor are conscious of their rights. Thus in 1981 the Maharashtra Rajya Shetmajoor and Employment Guarantee Scheme Workers Samanvya Samiti was formed to liaison with the government over continuous local level conflicts that were erupting in various parts of the State over the implementation of EGS.

The administrative mechanism to implement the EGS had been earlier suggested by these movements was conceptualised to ensure that the scheme remained poor-friendly. Three features characterised this structure. First, planning, execution, budget and review of the EGS was organised to remain autonomous from other government departments. Second, in order to ensure that if demand of work is made at the taluka level, the district and the state levels would ensure its realisation in case of a lapse at the lower level. Third it

provided space for direct negotiations between party political leaders, bureaucrats together with academics and movement leaders over bottlenecks in execution and implementation and in reframing rules and regulation such that it remained sensitive to the poor. However in practise the administrative structure was not rural friendly, unless the poor were mobilised to confront the administration on all these issues. It could become, as Vishal Jadhav has shown titled to favour the elite. The Samanvaya Samiti was formed to ensure that these issues were resolved to the benefit of the rural poor at the State level in negotiations between it and the government. (Sanjay Savale shows how these provisions still help to make this programme poor friendly, and help to ward off starvation, despite recent changes in its structure that benefit the elite.)

The first few years of this formation helped to smoothen the administrative problems. Shaji Joseph documents the Statewide struggles that it initiated. This has its immediate benefits for the rural poor. Osmani (1991) has argued that, EGS was able to reduce rural poverty levels by at least 33% since its institutionalisation in 1977-78. The decline was particularly significant between 1983 and 1987-88. Additionally large amount of funds were spent. EGS accounted for an average of 19% of the capital spending of the State government during 1984/5 to 1988/9. At its peak in the late 1980s, the EGS accounted for a fifth of the capital spending of the State government. (Government of Maharashtra, EGS, 1998:219)

However in the late eighties this mechanism of negotiations and consultations became less used as the mobilisations of the poor waned. Why did the mobilisations decline? Our research shows that many different factors coalesced in this phase. Vishal Jadhav has argued, from the mid 1980s onwards, the economy and the polity had changed in India and Maharashtra. Autarkic policies practiced in India since independence was now replaced by export led growth. The ideology of globalisation had started finding acceptance among Indian elite and had led to the introduction of strategies to make agricultural produce cater to global demands. Simultaneously, the demand of work had fallen as new schemes for poor were inaugurated and migration to urban areas had increased. Anurekha Chari and Shaji Joseph argue that NPPFs turned their attention towards the communal problems besetting urban India. At the same time conflicts regarding strategies and ideologies among the leadership of these movements created further dissensions within the movements. All these factors affected the implementation of the EGS and the strength of the Samanvay Samiti to bargain to ensure proper implementation of the EGS.

And yet as many commentators have argued that the period 1978 to 1988 remains the most significant one in EGS implementation in terms of its access to rural poor. (Dev, 2001, Vatsa, 2005) In this period, EGS employed the most number of people and distributed highest amount of expenditure. In the period 1972 to 1988, the average person days amounted to 161 million. This is the testament to the work done by NPPFs in ensuring effective mobilisation of the poor to demand work and to ensure the effective implementation of this programme.

Third Phase: 1988-90 onwards

We have noted one important trend regarding the implementation of EGS. This relates to its outreach towards the rural poor wherever there were people's movements and the conversion of these movements into larger long-term anti-state awakenings. These protest and agitations not only tried to implement and make the Act sensitive to the needs of the rural poor but also extend it to incorporate the nature of work process. Over time, these agitations and movements developed a critique of the state and its development policies.

However once the movement declined, EGS came to be concentrated in the 'top ten' list of districts. These are Ahmednagar, Aurangabad, Beed, Bhandara, Dhule, Nanded, Nashik, Osmanabad, Pune and Solapur. No wonder Dev (2001) has stated that statistical analysis has revealed a skewed distribution pattern of EGS works since 1978, as these are mainly concentrated in the Western Maharashtra region. Dev (2001) argues that it benefited the elite as it subsidised agriculture labour during the lean season and helped to keep wages low. The administrative structure evolved by the movements proved helpful also in this case, ironically, because the local MLAs and political leaders in EGS committees now used their influence to decide many issues relating to EGS including the location of EGS works. This allows them to extend their patronage, which as Vishal Jadhav argues, makes EGS as one more institution together with the cooperatives, the Panchayati Raj and the Congress Party of power in Western Maharashtra region.

There was an attempt to extend this trend, that is converting it into an instrument of elite interests, when some Maratha leaders and bureaucrats proposed that EGS works be extended to horticulture and to Jawahar wells programme and introduced its execution by contractors. Since the late eighties, Vishal Jadhav states, the State Maratha leadership has been promoting production of agricultural products, such as vegetables, loose flowers, grapes, and cashew, all tuned to the global market.

Thus available statistics indicate that in this region, EGS is mainly used to create nullahs, bunds and tanks to link it to the irrigation canals in private lands. The Western Maharashtra districts together account for more than 70% of the land under sugarcane in the State and a fairly high percentage of area devoted to fruits and vegetables.

Vishal Jadhav in his paper argues that in the late 1980s, the two new schemes – the Horticulture and Jawahar Wells programmes - accounted for about a quarter of EGS expenditures in the 1990s. Despite the formal eligibility requirements intended to direct these funds to small farmers, they mainly benefit the rural rich. This new 'funding window' opened within the Scheme allowed large farmers to use some EGS funds directly to subsidize their own agricultural investments. The EGS sectoral expenditure for the period, 1990-2001 shows that, irrigation and horticulture including Jawahar well scheme have taken up the maximum funds (45%), followed by agriculture at 14% (Vatsa, 2005). This again shows a bias towards the kind of works undertaken by the EGS in this

period. The Government data points to the fact that most of the expenditure has gone into developing private lands rather than using funds for development of public utilities.

Additionally, independent micro level studies show that these changes in the programme have led to a fundamental change in the administration of the scheme. The entrance of an outsider in form of a contractor has increased corruption as they act in collusion with muster clerks to add fictitious names and thereby drain resources.

No wonder most evaluations of the scheme argue that it is difficult to accept its efficacy as an anti-poverty programme. Though, it financed 3,597 million person days of work on irrigation, soil and water conservation, reforestation, and local roads from 1972 until 2001. (Krishnaraj, 2004:225), some scholars argue (Abraham 1980, Sathe, 1991, Datt and Ravallion, 1992, Gaiha and Deolalikar, 1993, Gent 1993, Dev, 2001) that the EGS has functioned more as a relief programme. Some micro level studies Ravallion (1991), Datt and Ravallion (1992) have demonstrated that EGS is well targeted as regards the poor as a relief programme. Dandekars' (1983) research findings demonstrate that almost 90% of the EGS workers belonged to the poorer sections. Further Datt and Ravallion (1992 and 1997) study on two villages from Maharashtra (Shirapur and Kanzara) demonstrates that at least half of the total EGS expenditure directly reached the participants who belonged to the landless and marginal farmer category. These scholars (Gent 1988, Acharya, 1990, Vatsa, 2005) contend that EGS has in practice not been able to guarantee employment, though it has been extremely responsive during drought years and has augmented the income of the poor in such calamities.

According to Dev (1996), the benefits accrued to the EGS participants (work force) as a relief programme has been the following - a) wages- even though the EGS wages were suppressed (they were doubled in 1988) the workers were paid on a weekly basis. Further as Vatsa (2005) has demonstrated, EGS expenditure on wages has on an average (1972/73-2003/04) remained above 60%; this according to him is high when compared to other anti-poverty programmes and it became insurance for employment in the lean agricultural season (April to July); b) food coupons- a part of the wages is paid through food coupons especially in drought years which safeguard the interests of the rural poor against steep inflationary trends, thus providing them with some kind of food security; c) demand driven employment programme- it did not restrict the number of participants from a family; d) increase of bargaining power of agricultural labour vis-a-vis the employer or landlord; e) high percentage of involvement of women- studies (Dev, 1995 and Krishnaraj et al, 2004) have demonstrated that women constitute 40 to 50 percent of the total EGS work force.

But what has been its impact on poverty reduction? Dev (2001) suggests that EGS might not have had significant impact on poverty in terms of head count ratio but it has definitely helped in diluting the intensity of poverty. He demonstrates how the gap between the very poor and the poor has actually been narrowing and this phenomenon is most pronounced in districts that have received EGS works for a long time.

In spite of these achievements, EGS in practice has demonstrated certain shortcomings, regarding - a) creation of sustainable and productive assets- scholars (Abraham, 1980, Sathe 1991, Gaiha, 1996 and Dev, 1997) who have examined the working of EGS have argued that one of the fundamental objectives of the scheme was not achieved i.e. that of creating sustainable and productive assets in rural areas b) uneven spatial distribution of EGS works- c) decline in its outreach to the poor- Gaiha (1993) and Dev (2001) have demonstrated that its outreach overtime has declined in the aftermath of amendments to the EGS act in 1988 and 1990 respectively d) nature of work - Dandekar (1980) and Sathe (1991) have demonstrated through research that the kind of employment opportunities offered is of the menial kind (stone breaking, earth carrying among others) and therefore the component of skill development of the workers is absent e) suppression of wages- Herring and Edwards (1983), Gent (1988) and Acharya (1990) argue that the EGS wages are kept below minimum wages f) seasonal variation- Abraham (1980) and Sathe (1991) point to the fact that work is offered only in the lean agricultural season.

### Conclusion

In 2003 when the Congress led coalition, the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) formed the Government it announced the common minimum programme (CMP). The key legislation that the CMP proposed was the introduction of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) that was later passed in 2005. For the last two years there has been a major debate over the design and efficacy of this Act. Critics have questioned its specific provisions, such as, the allocation of the budget from central funds, the standardisation and uniformity of wages across the country, and noted that its implementation can generate extensive corruption. Others have questioned whether such a poverty alleviation programme can indeed decrease poverty, provide employment and create public assets. This debate has also opened up a discussion on the success of Maharashtra's Employment Guarantee Scheme or EGS, which formed the basis for enacting the NREGA. What lessons does our research on EGS indicate?

We need to understand that poverty alleviation programmes are essentially devised and designed in societies where the distribution of power and resources are biased against the poor and the exploited. These programmes thus cannot attempt to change distribution of resources of power unless those who are exploited and are poor demand such changes. In a recent paper, Harriss-White (2006) argues that poverty is created by the dynamics of capitalism and that it is important that one understands the institutional structures that propagate these before designing poverty alleviation programmes.

We contend that EGS design is unique because of the three factors outlined above, i.e., work on demand, its statutory status and the autonomous nature of its budget which together with provisions regarding workers' benefits make this scheme administratively superior to any other programme, as Sanjay Savale has argued in his paper. In his paper, Savale compares EGS with the recently introduced Sampooma Gramin Rozgar Yojana (SGRY). The latter works on the principle of decentralisation where peoples'

representatives are involved in its planning and execution. Savale argues that in SGRY it is the dominant groups in the village that take decision regarding distribution of resources. On the other hand, he finds the EGS superior because it gives employment to the poor when they need it.

The EGS administrative mechanism provides a system of checks and balances such that it gives space to various interests and groups in contemporary society to intervene for the benefit of the poor. If it empowers workers and their organisations it also empowers bureaucrats to ensure its proper implementation. Over the course of last two decades, there have been many cases of sensitive bureaucrats, who have used EGS provisions relating to transparency in order to question political interests that attempted to subvert its extension to the 'real' poor. (the Act gives them power to make public these anomalies).<sup>4</sup> Additionally where the EGS has directly benefited the elite it has also been able to ward off starvation deaths and give employment to the landless and small peasants.

Given the nature of distribution of resources and power in countries like India such a scheme can prove to be a radical instrument of social change and contains enormous potential for making a critical assessment of the state and the nature of its domination. This happened with EGS in Maharashtra. And though such mobilisations waned in the nineties, we can see a resurgence of this trend once again. It is unfortunate that the new NREGA scheme has not become a party programme, either of the Congress or of the CPI (M) both of whom have been sponsoring this scheme. For if it does, then it can have the same potentialities of creating radical changes as EGS had in Maharashtra in the seventies and eighties.

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<sup>4</sup> Bureaucrats such as Arun Bhatia, retired IAS, the present district collector of Sangli, Manisha Mhaskar and the then district collector of Sholapur Manisha Verma are some who have made innovative changes in the implementation of the scheme while at the same time made public the corruption taking place in EGS.

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