

Job scheme helps royal families in distress: study

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PALAKKAD: The National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), implemented by the Union Government, has helped provide a regular source of income to several members of the erstwhile royal families in the State who lost their land holdings after the implementation of the Land Reforms Act.

A survey conducted by the Centre for Rural Management, Kottayam, on a directive from the Union Ministry of Rural Development, found "that 15 to 20 royal family members are engaged in NREGS works in the area."

The survey found that "equal wages were paid to both men and women, probably for the first time in the history of wage employment programmes in Kerala.

The scheme helped reduce household indebtedness, as revealed by 66 per cent of the beneficiaries in the district."

Janaki (42), a resident of Vadakke Cherukothilam House in Ward No. 3 of Akathethara grama panchayat in the Malampuzha block in the district, is a member of the erstwhile Palakkattuserry royal family of Palakkad.

Dispossession

The family owned a vast extent of land in the district before Independence. They lost the princely State and power after Independence. The Land Reforms Act also dispossessed it of its land given for cultivation on lease and share cropping basis.

Ms. Janaki's family consists of her husband and three children who struggle to eke out a living.

When she learnt of the NREGS from a grama panchayat member, she registered her name at the Akathethara panchayat office. She was issued a job card (SI.No. KL-06-008-001-003\076) and a bank account was opened.

She has worked for 97 days under the scheme so far and has received Rs.7,500 as wages.

Ms. Janaki said initially she was reluctant to take up manual work in public due to certain inhibitions and her royalty status. She began working under the NREGP scheme when a temple pond was taken up for removal of silt.

Since then, she has been regularly working under the scheme. Ms. Janaki said she considered this work as a 'Panchayat work' with dignity attached to it unlike other daily wage works.

Inspired by her, more than a dozen of her relatives who were facing a poverty-like situation have joined the programme