

MNREGA unable to keep people in hills

LOW WAGES under the scheme fail to lure the youths. Besides, doing petty mason work does not go well with most of educated youngsters in the hills, writes Anupam Trivedi

MIGRATION FROM HILLS

PART-4

PAURI / TEHRI GARHWAL: Harpal, 17, and Mahendra, 16 are close friends living in the Bhilangana block of Tehri districts. There is a striking similarity between both the friends studying in Class 12 and 11 respectively.

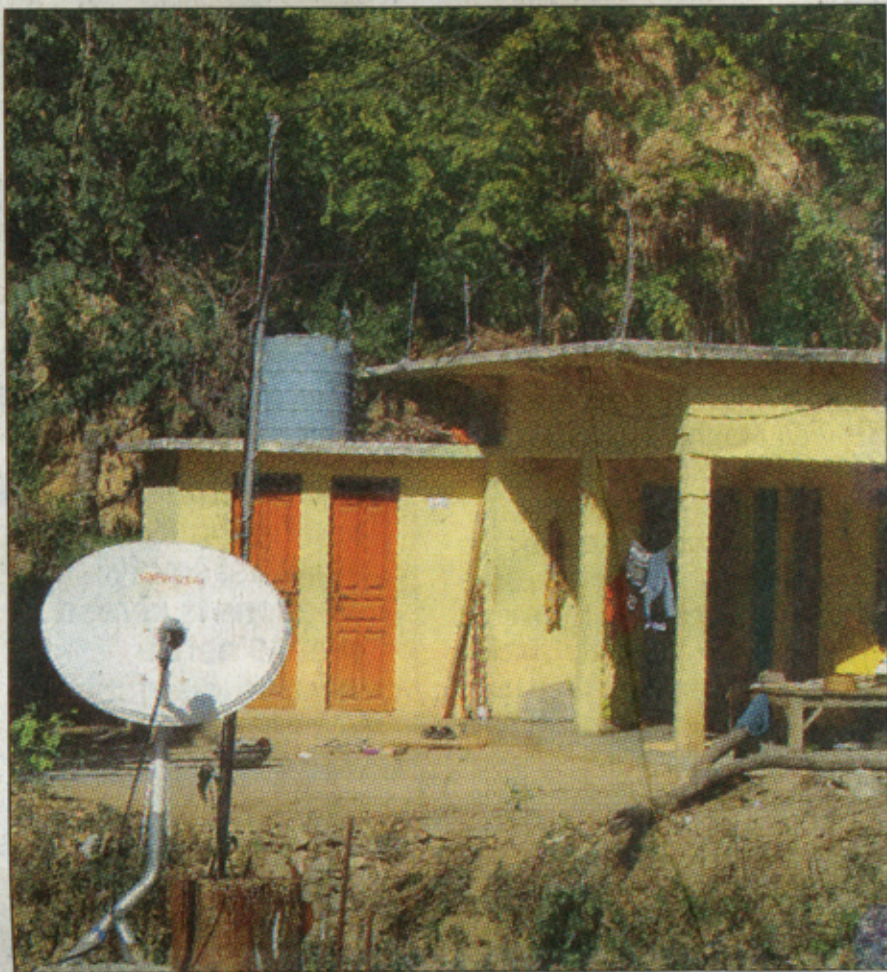
"Colours is my favourite channel and I am fan of Salman Khan," shares a shy looking Mahendra as he flaunts Chinese brand of cell phone where he has saved pictures and songs from Salman Khan flick - Bodyguard.

"Although I help grandfather in farming but we have little options of livelihood here," adds Harpal who either wants to work with some 'good' company or else with some government department. He, too, has a lot of interest in Bollywood films and television.

With the growing media exposure and penetration of direct to home (DTH) channels, the youth in Uttarakhand are looking for big opportunities.

The central scheme under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) that guarantees 100 days of employment and income of at least ₹12,000 per annum, apparently cannot lure the youngsters enough to be viewed as an option for employment at home.

Figures suggest there is a huge difference between the numbers of registered people and those who have actually benefited. According to union rural development department website 3,02,263 people falling



■ (From left) Dish TV is common in rural homes . A home in Nogaon valley in Uttarkashi, (Right) Dalbir Singh (left) of Kamera village doing mason's work.

HT PHOTO

between 18-30 years of age in nine hill districts are registered under MNREGA, while only 48,912 worked under the scheme. That means only 16% opted for employment.

Similarly, 1,52,388 people above 60 years in the nine hill districts are registered, while only 37,423 or 24% preferred employment.

It shows that youngsters are least interested in working under MNREGA scheme. "Youths are educated in hills, doing petty mason work does not go well with most of youngsters," explains Dalbir Singh, 52, of Kamera village who prefers working under MNREGA when he has spare time from farming. As a matter of

fact, MNREGA was initially brought in to stem the tide of urbanisation to seek petty jobs elsewhere.

"Though MNREGA is a good scheme that provides ample opportunities to build the infrastructure in the villages, to cater to other agricultural needs, most prominently, the need to improve irrigation facilities, yet it could not bear good results," feels Jagmohan Singh of village Dangi in Pauri Garhwal.

"Even unskilled labourers get not less than ₹250 per day and the youth do not fall for ₹120 offered as MNREGA wages per day," he says.

Arvind Moudgil, a local journalist from Pauri reveals, "Over 1,09,000 job cards have been

issued in the Pauri district alone but only 58,000 families have asked for job under MNREGA till January 2012. Surprisingly, only 387 families have completed full 100 working days in 2011-12 in the district".

"Majority of those who demand work constitutes women and old people. The young are not interested because they can get double the wages even as an unskilled labourer elsewhere," Moudgil underlines.

However, Jagmohan Singh, Manvir Rawat, Ajay Rawat and many more villagers of Kaljikkhal block in Pauri believe that if a project were beneficial for the village or the area, people would opt for it despite the low wages.



They feel apathy of the employees at the village and block level is the main stumbling block in the path of MNREGA in the hills.

In fact, MC Upreti, DM Pauri has also asked the offi-

cers concerned to improve the situation in the recent review meeting.

This report is part of Inclusive Media Fellowship 2011 to study distress migration from Uttarakhand hills.