

MGNREGA workers lose wages and work

- [P. V. Srividya](#)

“Do you see how tightly I have wrapped my saree around the waist,” asks Pachamma. “I tightened it up so that I don’t feel hungry,” she says. Pachamma, along with her two daughters Chitra and Chinnaponnu, came to the State Bank of Mysore, Anchetty branch, about 50 km from Kodagarai village in Anchetty in Denkanikottai on Thursday morning. On Saturday, they were still there, having slept two nights outside the bank.

Until then, the three Rs.1,000 notes held by the women were prized savings they had, eked out through MNREGA schme work. But, as they waited outside for the third consecutive day on Saturday, they were grimly aware of the three days of wages lost. “We lost three days of “100-day work just sitting here,” says Chinnaponnu.

And the notes had not fetched them a single meal so far. Chitra’s one-year-old son is already restless. “We bought puffed rice for Rs.10 and drank water from that bore pump there,” says Pachamma. She spoke to *The Hindu* after she was once again turned away by the bank, when she had approached for the requisition slip. They cannot go back, because they can’t afford another Rs.100 for the trip back and forth per head through the forest-fringed roads frequented by elephants.

Adjacent to the bank, ‘black sales’ of the bank requisition slips for exchange of cash in a demonetisation drive against black money is brisk. The bank has not printed enough forms and hence the photocopy centre outside is selling the form at Rs.10. Then there is the man who fills it up for a charge of Rs.10. Some 80 km away at the district headquarters in Krishnagiri, a cash exchange that took less than half an hour, has sapped three wage days of the rural poor.

“To exchange Rs.1,000, I lost Rs.400 a day,” says another man. The women who waited the whole of Friday to exchange Rs.4,000, got only Rs.1,000. “They said there is no money,” says Jayalakshmi, who has left her three young children at home and will have to go back to the village.

