



## HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS OF WOMEN AGRICULTURAL WORKERS

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### ABSTRACT

Human rights are basic rights, which emphasize humanity and equality of all people. But in reality, many of the sections including women agricultural workers are deprived from basic human rights. Due to the problems such as wage discrimination, exploitation and atrocities from employers, domestic violence, socio-economic inequality, deprivation in education, poverty, etc, human rights of many of the women agricultural workers are violated. To study the human rights violations, the present study was made in Hyderabad-Karnataka region to survey women agricultural workers. Totally 1400 women agricultural workers living in six districts of the region were surveyed through interviews. It is found that, many of the women agricultural workers are facing many of the problems discussed above and as such, their human rights are violated. Hence, it is suggested to increase awareness of women agricultural workers on human rights and legislations passed to protect the human rights of these workers.

**KEYWORDS:** Human rights , deprivation in education , poverty.

### INTRODUCTION

Human rights are the fundamental rights, which are essential for man and woman to lead a dignified life. They are defined as those rights and freedoms which are a must for all human beings. They include all rights that should be enjoyed by every individual irrespective of class, gender, age, caste, religion, language, creed, status, and beliefs. Human rights include rights to life, rights to adequate food, rights to shelter, rights to clothes, rights to pollution free air, rights to noise free surroundings, rights to have safe drinking water, rights to vote, rights to participate in all social, economic and political activities, rights to embrace any religion, rights to speak and the like. The fundamental rights of all human beings are the rights to life. It includes almost all rights listed out above. Human rights should be enjoyed by every member of the human family. Hence, they are absolute, universal and inalienable. No power on earth can deprive an individual of his/her rights.

Human rights emphasize equal status for all human beings. But in reality, there is all round discrimination based on gender, caste, religion, occupation, economic status, region, etc. It is noted that the Indian Constitution has already provided different provisions to emphasize equality and humanity. Based on such provisions, many of the Acts and legislations have been passed in India. Still, there is violation of human rights, especially rights of vulnerable groups. These vulnerable groups mainly include women and women working in unorganized sector.

The international consensus on human rights is represented by the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which outlaw's discrimination based on sex. Women have the same human rights as



men. Most African states have agreed in principle to this document, and many African constitutions make specific reference to it. In 1979, the United Nations proclaimed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which specifically addresses the rights of women in development, and in particular the rights of rural women, acknowledging “the significant roles which rural women play in the economic survival of their families”.

The World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna in June 1993, laid extensive groundwork for eliminating violence against women. In the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, governments declared that the United Nations system and Member States should work towards the elimination of violence against women in public and private life; of all forms of sexual harassment, exploitation and trafficking in women; of gender bias in the administration of justice; and of any conflicts arising between the rights of women and the harmful effects of certain traditional or customary practices, cultural prejudices and religious extremism.

Article 2 of the Indian Constitution guarantees rights without discrimination as to sex, but Article 18 stresses the family as the “natural unit and basis of society”, and Article 17(3) also mandates that the state should protect “morals and traditional values recognized by the community”. Traditional values frequently reflect deeply held ideological beliefs that include an entrenched notion of the moral inferiority of women to men and of the need to subordinate women to men's familial and political authority (Raji and Sindhe, 2011). The concept of Human Rights represents an attempt to protect the individual from oppression and injustice. They provide a human standard of achievement for all the people and all the nations. Therefore, these rights are by nature independent, inalienable and inviolable and hence universal (Abdul Rahim and Vijapur, 1999).

Women in India, traditionally and in the post-colonial period have suffered multiple oppressions. They are denied, in most instances, equal access to food, health and education, in addition to carrying the double burden of household and wage work. Moreover, when they are engaged in the latter, they invariably earn lower wages and become the first targets of economic retrenchment.

In India, the statistics revealed that, over 96 percent of women work in the informal, unorganized sector. Overall, the informal sector constitutes 93 percent of the workforce of the population of India. Moreover, these workers contribute 62 percent to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 50 per cent to the national income. This sector includes workers employed in a wide range of economic activities, from street vendors and casual workers in a tea-shop to agricultural workers, small and marginal farmers to ‘bidi’ workers, construction workers, salt pan workers and sub-contracted and temporary workers of factories. However, unlike workers in the formal sectors, they do not have access to regular incomes or welfare benefits, making them extremely vulnerable to change and insecurity.

The following table shows the estimates of employment in informal sector in Millions in 2006.

**Estimates of Employment in Informal Sector (in Millions), 2006**

Sector	Male	Female	Total
Agriculture	142.46	90.33	232.79
Non-Agriculture	85.48	22.04	107.52
Total	227.94	112.37	340.31

Source: Redefining of Unorganized Sector in India, Report of the Expert Group on Informal Sector, May 2006.

According to Sundaram (2001), the 9 sectors where 90% where Indian women work are agriculture, livestock, textiles and textile products, beverage and tobacco, food products, construction, petty retail trade, education and research and domestic services. The number of women working in agriculture in the years 1999-2000 was 7,91,30,000 which accounted for 64.3% of the workforce. Next is livestock which accounted for 9% of the workforce. The domestic services sector employed 3.2%, retail trade 3.4%, textiles and textile products 2.8% and beverage and tobacco industry 3.0 % of the workforce in the same period. Hence, women are dominated in agricultural labour sector.

Though, women are playing important role in agricultural work, still their status is lower at their households and at workplaces. The wages paid to women workers is lower and discriminatory. Many of the landlords are exploiting and discriminating and even sexually harassing women workers at their work places. As almost women workers are illiterates or low-educated, they are being exploited at their households due to domestic violence, psychological suppression, etc. Even they don't have freedom to mingle with their co-workers. Hence, their human rights are violated. In this respect, the present study is made to survey women agricultural workers to study their problems and challenges, which turned as human rights violations.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

#### The study is made:

1. To know about the freedom of women agricultural workers at their work places and at their families.
2. To look into the problems and challenges faced by women agricultural workers at their households and at workplaces.
3. To find out the wage discrimination and workload of women agricultural workers.
4. To study the human rights violations of women agricultural workers in Hyderabad-Karnataka region.

### METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS:

The authors have studied importance of human rights and relevance of the same at global level. It is found from different research papers, journal articles, books, web sites, etc published on human rights violations that, women agricultural workers are most vulnerable groups facing many of the problems and challenges and consequently, their human rights are violated. It was decided to survey women agricultural workers living in Hyderabad-Karnataka region. The region is constituted into six districts, Bidar, Kalaburagi (Gulbarga), Raichur, Bellary, Koppal and Yadgir. As the geographical territory of the region is vast and large population of women agricultural workers, a sample survey of total 1400 women agricultural workers living in Hyderabad-Karnataka region is made with the help of interview schedule. The collected primary data is analysed, interpreted and discussed as under.

### ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION:

Maintaining cordial and cooperative relations with co-workers and friends is essentially needed for everyone including women agricultural workers. Even it is treated as human right. In this respect, it was asked to women agricultural workers that whether they are mingling with their co-workers especially with male co-workers working with them and the collected primary data is tabulated as under.

**Table No. 1. Whether Mingle with Co-workers**

Mingle with Co-Workers	Number of Women Workers	Percentage
Yes	532	38.00
No	868	62.00
Total	1400	100

Surprisingly, it is highlighted from the above table that, majority that is, 868 (62.00%) of all the women agricultural workers are not mingling with their co-workers at their work places, whereas only 532 (38.00%) are mingling with their co-workers. Probably, women agricultural workers are suffering from lack of sufficient freedom from their family members.

Mainly the above discussion revealed that there are restrictions from the husbands and employers of women agricultural workers to mingle with their co-workers. It has proved that there is lack of freedom for women agricultural workers. The feelings expressed by women agricultural workers from lack of freedom due to family and work place restrictions are shown as under.

**Table No. 2. Feeling from Lack of Freedom due to Restrictions from Employers and Family Members**

Lack of Freedom due to Employers & Family	Number of Women Workers	Percentage
Yes	501	35.78
No	239	17.07
Can't Say	128	9.14
Not Applicable	532	38.00
Total	1400	100

Above table made it clear that, 501 (35.78%) of all the women agricultural workers have agreed that there is lack of freedom due to restrictions from employers and family members, whereas 239 (17.07%) have disagreed to the same, 128 (9.14%) have not expressed their views on the same and it is not applicable to 532 (38.00%) of the women agricultural workers as they are enjoying all types of freedom. It shows that, there is freedom restrictions for nearly half of women agricultural workers and in such way, their human rights are violated.

Women are biologically and socially weaker gender. As such, they have possessed secondary or subjugated status in family and society. Consequently, women are facing different problems mainly violence in family and society. In families, many of women are facing domestic violence, psychological suppression, depression, etc. In society including work places, they are facing physical assault, sexual exploitation, discrimination, etc. In this way, there is violation of human rights of women at their families and work places. The collected primary data on violence faced by women agricultural workers is presented as under.

**Table No. 3. Facing Violence in Family and Work Place**

Facing Violence in Family & Society	Number of Women Workers	Percentage
Domestic Violence	342	24.43
Assault & Sexual Exploitation	114	8.14
Psychological Suppression & Depression	252	18.00
Any Other	--	--
None	692	49.43
Total	1400	100

It is highlighted from the above table that, among all the women agricultural workers surveyed, 342 (24.43%) are facing domestic violence, 114 (8.14%) are facing physical assault and sexual exploitation, 252 (18.00%) are facing psychological suppression and depression from their employers and only 692 (49.43%) of the respondents are not facing such violence in their families and at their work places. Due to violence faced by majority of women agricultural workers, there is violation of human rights.

Cordial and cooperative relationship with employers is essential for smooth working in agriculture. It is blamed by many of the women agricultural workers that their employers or landlords are exploiting them by work overload or work for longer hours and by paying lower and discriminatory wages. The attitudes of employers or landlords as expressed by respondents are tabulated as under.

**Table No. 4. Attitudes of Employers**

Attitudes of Employers	Number of Women Workers	Percentage
Best & Cordial	266	19.00

Satisfactory	811	57.93
Hostile & Not Satisfactory	323	23.07
Total	1400	100

The attitudes of employers as stated by women agricultural workers revealed that, 266 (19.00%) have stated that their employers have best and cordial relationship with them, 811 (57.93%) have expressed that they have satisfactory relationship with their employers and 323 (23.07%) have felt that there is hostile and unsatisfactory relationship with their employers. Hostile attitudes of employers are violating human rights of women agricultural workers.

It was asked to the respondents that how there is hostile and unsatisfactory relationship with their employers and the collected primary data is tabulated as under.

**Table No. 5. Hostile & Unsatisfactory Attitudes of Employers**

Hostile & Unsatisfactory Attitudes of Employers	Number of Women Workers	Percentage
Gender Discrimination	146	10.43
Personal Exploitation	93	6.64
Sexual Harassment	84	6.00
Any Other	--	--
Not Applicable	1077	76.93
Total	1400	100

On the reactions of women agricultural workers towards hostile and unsatisfactory attitudes of their employers, 146 (10.43%) have felt that there is gender discrimination from their employers, 93 (6.64%) have agreed that there is personal exploitation from their employers, 84 (6.00%) have opined that there is sexual harassment from their employers and it is not applicable to 1077 (76.93%) of the respondents as they have best, cordial or satisfactory relationship with their employers. Gender discrimination, personal exploitation and sexual harassment of women agricultural workers disclosed the human rights violations of women agricultural workers.

Fair and equal wages for equal work is essential and it is also emphasized by human rights. It was asked to the respondents that whether they are satisfied with their wages and collected information is shown as under.

**Table No. 6. Satisfaction with Wages**

Satisfaction with Wages	Number of Women Workers	Percentage
Best in Similar Occupation	458	32.71
At Par with Similar Occupations	510	36.43
Discriminatory & Lower Wages	286	20.43
Unsatisfactory	146	10.43
Total	1400	100

As stated by all the women agricultural workers on their extent of satisfaction about payment of wages, 458 (32.71%) have felt that their wages are best in similar occupations, 510 (36.43%) have agreed that their wages are at par with similar occupations, 286 (20.43%) have opined that there is lower and discriminatory wages and 146 (10.43%) have remarked that there is unsatisfactory wages paid to them in agricultural works. Lower and discriminatory wages violate the human rights of women agricultural workers.

Few of the workers always feel unsatisfied with their working conditions or terms and conditions of work and even attitudes of their employers. Few of the workers though feel unsatisfied with the same, express that they are satisfied with their work and wages. Hence, it is noted that, few of the workers always

feel that their employers are exploiting and discriminating them at work places and the collected primary data in this regard is depicted as under.

**Table No. 7. Exploitation and Discrimination from Employer**

Exploitation & Discrimination from Employer	Number of Women Workers	Percentage
Yes	343	24.50
No	840	60.00
Can't Say	217	15.50
Total	1400	100

It is emphasized that, 343 (24.50%) of the women agricultural workers have expressed that their employers are exploiting and discriminating them at work places, whereas 840 (60.00%) have disagreed to the same and 217 (15.50%) have not expressed their views on the same.

As discussed above, 343 of all women agricultural workers have agreed that their employers are exploiting or discriminating them and the reasons furnished by them for the same are as under.

**Table No. 8. Reasons for Exploitation and Discrimination from Employers**

Reasons for Exploitation and Discrimination	Number of Women Workers	Percentage
Gender Discrimination in Work	216	15.43
Much Competition in Unskilled Work	74	5.29
Insecurity in Job & Work	35	2.50
Any Other	18	1.29
Not Applicable	1057	75.50
Total	1400	100

Of all the women agricultural workers surveyed, 216 (15.43%) are facing gender discrimination at work places, 74 (5.29%) are facing much competition in unskilled work, 35 (2.50%) are facing problems of job and work insecurity, 18 (1.29%) are facing other problems and it is not applicable to 1057 (75.50%) of women agricultural workers as they are not exploited or not discriminated by their employers.

It has been already revealed from the present study that, women agricultural workers are facing discrimination and sexual harassment at their work places and the issues in which these workers are discriminated and acts of sexual harassment at their work places are discussed as under.

**Table No. 9. Issues of Discrimination and Sexual Harassment at Work Place**

Issues of Discrimination & Sexual Harassment	Number of Women Workers	Percentage
Use of Filthy & Abusive Language	113	8.07
Physical Touch	121	8.64
Force for Sexual Intercourse	60	4.29
Any Other	--	--
Can't Say	49	3.50
Not Applicable	1057	75.50
Total	1400	100

The issues of discrimination and sexual harassment at their work places as described by women agricultural workers revealed that, 113 (8.07%) are facing use of filthy and abusive language, 121 (8.64%) are facing physical touch from their employers, 60 (4.29%) are facing force for sexual intercourse, 49 (3.50%) have not expressed their views on the same and it is not applicable to 1057 (75.50%) of the respondents as they are not facing such situations.

The Factories Act has made it mandatory to subscribe Group insurance to all factories and companies, where there are more than 10 workers working. As the agriculture is small scale seasonal work place, such rules may not be applied. Still, as occupational safety of women agricultural workers, it was asked to the respondents that whether their life is secured and insured against occupational hazards at work places and collected information is tabulated as under.

**Table No. 10. Life is Secured and Insured Against Occupational Hazards at Work Places**

Life is Secured and Insured at Work Place	Number of Women Workers	Percentage
Yes	--	--
No	1218	87.00
Don't Know	182	13.00
Total	1400	100

Surprisingly, it is emphasized that, 1218 (87.00%) of the women agricultural workers have agreed that their employers have not insured and their life is insecure at their work places, whereas 182 (13.00%) are not aware about the same.

The study has revealed that, women agricultural workers are facing many of the problems and challenges both at their families as well as at their work places. As such, many of them are psychologically depressed. During such phase, it may be possible that they wish to take different decisions such as committing suicide, family disorganization, etc. The information collected on the psychological feelings and worries of the women agricultural workers at their families and at their work places are as under.

**Table No. 11. Feeling of Psychological Worries due to Family and Work Place Problems**

Feelings of Psychological Worries at Family and Work Places	Number of Women Workers	Percentage
Commit Suicide	33	2.36
Go Far Away from Family & Work	50	3.57
Leave the Present Work	165	11.78
Get Divorce & Live Single	28	2.00
Any Other	--	--
None	1124	80.28
Total	1400	100

As stated by all the women agricultural workers, 33 (2.36%) have felt that they wish to commit suicide occasionally, 50 (3.57%) have agreed that they think to go far away from family and work, 165 (11.78%) have thought to leave the present work, 28 (2.00%) have felt that they may get divorce and live single and 1124 (80.28%) of the women agricultural workers have no such worries and psychological problems.

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**CONCLUDING REMARKS:**

It is concluded that, human rights are basic rights for all human beings, which allows comfortable life for all human beings. These rights are based on humanity and as such, they emphasize humanity, equality, action against any types of discrimination such as caste, gender, economic status, wealth, etc. As such, these rights allow equality, freedom, fraternity, peaceful life, cooperation, equality in wealth, equality in socio-economic status, equal rights in education, dignity, curbing discrimination, restriction against exploitation, etc. But, when these issues of women agricultural workers are concerned, it is found from the present study that, human rights of these workers are violated as they are facing many of the problems and challenges such as wage discrimination, exploitation from employers, domestic violence, illiteracy, poverty, lack of freedom, atrocities by employers and family members, gender inequality, etc. Due to all these problems, their human rights are violated.

To protect the rights of women agricultural workers, there is need for legislations which strictly ensure equal rights for women agricultural workers and also provide social security for all women workers. Though there are many of the human rights and legislations, none of women agricultural workers are aware about such rights and legislations. Hence, there is need to increase awareness of women agricultural workers on human rights and legislations that protect the human rights. For this purpose, the NGOs and mass media have to organize mass awareness campaigns to increase awareness of all people on human rights.

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