

# ‘ANGANWADI WORKERS ENTITLED TO GRATUITY’

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

The Supreme Court on Monday held that anganwadi workers and helpers taking care of the nutrition needs of nearly 158 million children who were considered the “future resource of the country”, were entitled to gratuity, a basic social security measure.

A Bench of Justices Ajay Rastogi and A.K. Oka rued how these workers and helpers, who performed a bouquet of vital services at the grassroots level and were often the bridge between the government and beneficiaries under the National Food Security Act and the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), were made to fight so hard and for so long for the recognition of their right to be paid gratuity under the Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972.

The judgment came in an appeal filed by anganwadi workers and organisations represented by senior advocates Sanjay Parikh and P.V. Surendranath and advocate Subhash Chandran.

## Statutory obligation

“Gratuity is a gesture to appreciate the efforts of a person towards the betterment, development and prosperity of an establishment and that is the reason for which gratuity is considered to be social security, and with passage of time, it has become a statutory obligation on the part of employers,” Justice Rastogi observed in the verdict.

The court underscored that it was time for the Centre and the States to “collectively consider” bettering the service conditions of anganwadi workers and helpers.

It warned that a lack of motivation among them would have a crippling effect on the multiple tasks they performed.

## Backbone of ICDS

Anganwadi workers and helpers served in disadvantaged areas and catered to the needs of underprivileged groups. They formed the backbone of the ICDS.

Not only children but also women benefited from the services provided by the anganwadi centres.

“Socialised childcare contributes to the liberation of women... It lightens the burden of looking after children,” the court noted.

It said the ICDS deserved far greater attention in public policy.

“The scheme acts as an “institutional mechanism for realisation of child and women rights. Yet these services are regarded as State largesse rather than as enforceable entitlements,” the court observed in a 72-page judgment.

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