

Examrace

Legal Aid and Access to Justice: The Supreme Court Legal Services Committee

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Legal Aid and Access to Justice

- Another issue which concerns a vast section of people seeking justice is the ability to access equal justice under law. The Government has accorded a crucial role to the judiciary to administer the Legal Services Authority Act which has multiple objectives. Rules have been framed under the Act and appropriate bodies have been set up at various levels to reach out the message of rule of law and equality in access to justice to every nook and corner of this vast country.
- The Supreme Court Legal Services Committee grants legal aid to litigants in the Supreme Court which has over 200 advocates including Senior Advocates to render aid to deserving litigants. It maintains its own website and e-mail through which assistance can be obtained from anywhere. For middle income group the Committee renders assistance at subsidized rates through eminent lawyers. Similar arrangements are in place at the High Courts and subordinate courts. Apart from giving litigation aid including the services of lawyers to represent in court, the Legal Services Authority organizes Lok Adalat's to facilitate negotiated or mediated settlement of disputes. The programmes and policies are evolved and supervised by the National Legal Services Authority presided over by a Senior Supreme Court judge. It has undertaken a series of programmes to assist different sections of needy people particularly from the weaker sections.
- As part of the legal literacy mission and social justice goals, NALSA has launched several campaigns for the successful implementation of the National Rural Employment programme, Protection of rights of women, Children, Dalits and the disabled persons. Legal aid is conceived as a social movement for the legal empowerment of all sections of people for equal justice under law. In this effort a national network of legal aid centres and civil society groups is being set up which can mobilize social action for good governance under law. This is a silent revolution under way to make a success of our democracy. In a small way the judiciary is extending a helping hand in this social empowerment mission though it is outside their usual function of adjudication and settlement of disputes.
- I must on this occasion record my profound gratitude to my brother judges in the Supreme Court, High Courts and Subordinate Courts for the valuable efforts they are making to render timely justice to all litigants. Their sacrifices and commitment to justice have made rule of law an abiding principle of Constitutional democracy in our Republic.

- Let us all take a pledge on this Law Day that we will do everything possible to uphold the values of the Constitution and render justice to the people without fear, favour or ill will.

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