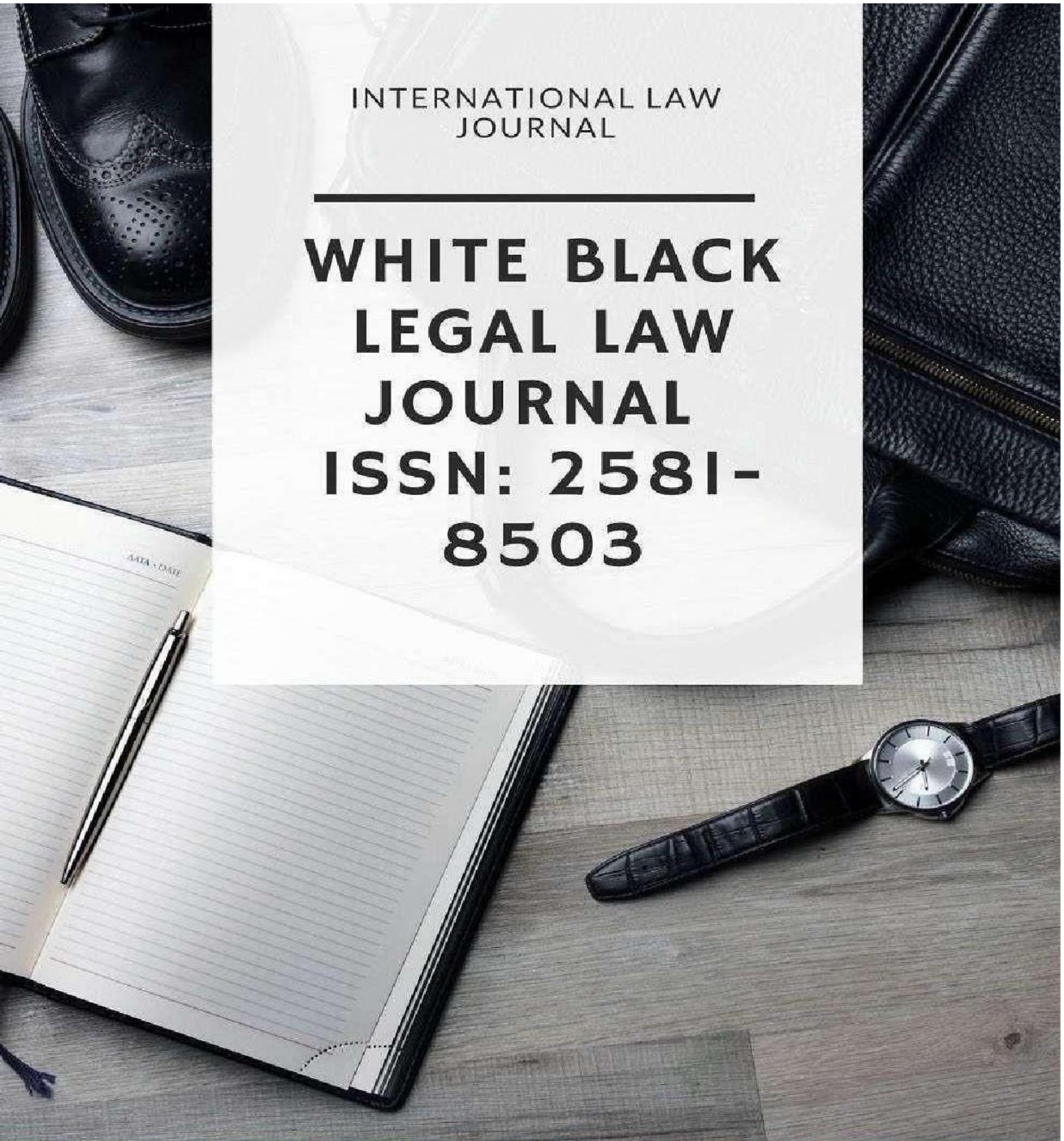




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LEGAL LITERACY IN THE DIGITAL ECONOMY: EXAMINING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PARA- LEGAL TRAINING IN SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

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Abstract:

In India's democratic framework, the Rule of Law serves as the bedrock of the Constitution, embodying its very essence. Within this constitutional paradigm, the legal profession stands as the vanguard, entrusted with the sacrosanct duty of safeguarding and advancing the foundational ideals of justice, equity, and constitutional supremacy. Legal literacy constitutes a pivotal instrument of social empowerment, fostering an informed citizenry capable of comprehending and asserting their legal entitlements. In India, para-legal training modules function as a critical conduit between formal legal institutions and marginalized communities, endowing Para-Legal Volunteers with indispensable legal acumen and pragmatic competencies. Para-Legal Volunteers main function under legal services institutions, serve as intermediaries between the legal system and the community by spreading awareness regarding legal rights, government schemes, consumer protection, cyber safety, digital financial transactions, and access to legal aid. The research critically evaluates whether existing para-legal training frameworks adequately equip volunteers to address contemporary challenges arising from digitization, including cyber fraud, data privacy concerns, digital financial exploitation and lack of awareness regarding online legal remedies.

The study adopts a doctrinal and socio-legal research methodology, analyzing legal aid policies, training manuals, digital governance initiatives, and relevant statutory frameworks, along with empirical observations regarding the implementation of para-legal services. It further explores the intersection between legal empowerment and digital economic participation by assessing how effective legal literacy can enhance financial inclusion, strengthen democratic participation, and reduce socio-economic vulnerabilities.

Keywords: Legal Literacy, Digital Economy, Para-Legal Volunteers, Economic

Empowerment.

1. INTRODUCTION

"Legal aid is, in essence, the practical manifestation of equal justice. It serves as the delivery mechanism for social justice, ensuring that legal assistance reaches those who need it the most."

- Justice P.N. Bhagwati

Access to justice is predicated upon the effective enforcement of rights, the guarantee of a fair hearing, and the provision of competent legal representation. Legal literacy serves as the foundational pillar in fostering a robust legal culture, constituting both a right and a duty to cultivate legal knowledge and skills among both legal professionals and the general populace, thereby reinforcing the principles of informed citizenship. The legal profession is in a perpetual state of evolution, continuously adapting to technological advancements, evolving client expectations, and shifting industry imperatives.¹ Within this dynamic landscape, paralegals serve as indispensable auxiliaries, providing critical support to lawyers and law firms through legal research, document drafting, and case management.

1.1 BACKGROUND

The problem of access to justice is a serious issue in India. There are huge unmet legal needs in the country. To ensure Access to justice, three components need to be fulfilled: the existence of a legal institutional framework, awareness among citizens regarding this framework and its processes, and citizens' effective access to them. The three-part necessity highlights the necessity of legal literacy as a key component of meaningful engagement in democratic governance and economic development. Concurrently, India's shift towards a digital economy has opened up new avenues for social and economic change in the country, while also uncovering fresh gaps in the knowledge and understanding of legal frameworks and digital competencies within vulnerable communities. At the same time, India's shift towards a digital economy has presented new opportunities for social and economic change, yet it has also revealed new gaps in the knowledge and understanding of legal frameworks and digital competencies among vulnerable populations. India is undergoing a rapid digital transformation, as the government's Digital India initiative aims to make India a digitally

¹ Pandey, A., Moti, S., & Naomi, S. S. (2025). Educating for social justice lawyering and community legal empowerment: Learnings from India and Bangladesh. *Asian Journal of Legal Education*, 12(1), 25–39. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23220058241289261>

empowered society and knowledge economy².

Despite the urban population enjoying access to digital technologies, rural areas are predominantly left out of this digital transformation. This digital divide could be a serious constraint on the economic and overall development of India if digital inclusion in the rural areas remains out of reach, thereby making it imperative for the country to advance in a digital era.³

Paralegal education is a component of a package of legal services that seeks to enhance access to justice for the poor and excluded. Since there are not enough lawyers to provide legal aid services, paralegal education is an important tool and method to provide the unmet legal needs of the people.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Education of the public concerning the law is a national priority. Though it is contributory, the present paradigm of education for para-legalism is still not regulated and broken, and there is need for joint action on curricular reform and standardization. The reforms are said to not only enhance the skills of para-legal practitioners, but also enhance the legal system by ensuring that the marginalised communities have more reliable and accessible legal support. The issue is exacerbated by the combination of several deprivations. Women have no awareness of their social and legal rights particularly in the rural areas. They believe that they are less well-off than men in some way whether it be economically, socially, or prestigiously. Though several steps have been taken by the government and other supporting bodies like NGOs, still the women's condition in society is not satisfactory. Different rules and regulations have been drafted but the government has to make sure that these rules are adhered in the society.⁴

1.3 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

It is the directive principle of state policy incorporated in Article 39A of the Indian Constitution to provide free legal aid for the purpose of ensuring equal access to justice for all the citizens of the country, especially the economically weaker sections of the society. The study examines the problems that have been encountered in providing legal assistance in an effective manner,

² Rao, S. D. (2013). Paralegal Education in India: Problems and Prospects. Journal of National Law University Delhi, 1(1), 94-105.

³ Patel, S. (2024). Perspective of digital transformation in rural India. International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR). <https://doi.org/10.21275/SR24402140819>.

⁴ Rao, S. (2013). *Paralegal education in India: Problems and prospects*. Social Science Research Network. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2277401720130106>

such as problems of awareness, resource allocation and the quality of legal assistance. It examines the systemic obstacles which impede the attainment of equitable justice, including the procedural difficulties, bureaucratic delays, and socio-economic disparities. Digital literacy is crucial in the context of digital economy because it enables the access to social inclusion, work, education and financial independence for women.⁵ But it remains significant digital gender gap, particularly in less developed countries such as India where women's access to the internet is limited and where financial constraints, social norms and a lack of digital training are limiting their ability to use technology.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- I. To study the situation of the legal literacy and para-legal training infrastructure in India with special reference to the people in the periphery of society living in rural and semi-urban areas.
- II. To Measure the effectiveness of Para-legal Training Programs in improving social empowerment by increasing awareness of rights, participation in decision making, social mobility etc.
- III. To assess the effects of Legal Literacy interventions on economic empowerment outcomes such as access to financial services, developmental entrepreneurship and livelihoods improvement.
- IV. To study the legal literacy and digital economy participation by looking at how the training of para-legals can help or hinder participation in digital platforms and services.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. Legal Literacy and Access to Justice in India

Legal Literacy and Access to Justice in India Justice, liberty, equality, fraternity, unity and integrity are the cornerstones of the Indian legal system. It emphasises the ethical values of fairness, reasonability, rationality, transparency and accountability, thus guaranteeing access to justice and ease to justice. The legal profession, and legal education, can and should play an important role in the creation of a just and equitable society.⁶ The very basis for the

⁵ Rao, S. (2025). Paralegal education in India: Problems and prospects. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*, 7(2). <https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2025.v07i02.40916>.

⁶ Arora, M., Khurana, P., & Rani, L. (2024). Women empowerment in India since 1947: A critical analysis. *International Journal of Experimental Research and Review*, 41(Spl Vol), 280–289. <https://doi.org/10.52756/ijerr.2024.v41spl.023>

formation of competent, social and moral lawyers who will be ready to fight for justice. The legal aid clinics of top law universities, colleges and schools are playing a central role in providing access to justice to the underprivileged and marginalized people through legal aid camps, awareness camps and trainings of paralegals. The Legal & Para-Legal Services have got the most special and primary role in administration of justice in delivery of justice. Law is the medium and it has the highest aim of justice.

3.2. Para-Legal Training: Framework and Implementation

The primary goal of critically analysing the existing legal frameworks, policy guidelines and models of education for para-legal services is to suggest potential reforms that will help address the current gaps in the services provided. The rule of law in India, as a whole, could be strengthened and legal aid democratized only through the establishment of an integrated and strong para-legal education system.⁷ The Tele-Law scheme is a huge innovation in the delivery of legal services. The Tele-Law scheme in India uses Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to assist in helping marginalised communities through Community Service Centers (CSCs). ICT has improved access to justice, especially in marginal and rural communities. The results show that legal access to the poor has considerably improved. For the Tele-Law implementation scheme, a few challenges were identified, including digital literacy, infrastructure gaps and systemic barriers.⁸

3.3. Digital Economy and Empowerment Nexus

In the context of sustainable development, the awareness of digital and technical among rural people can play a significant role in strengthening the economy of rural India and also help in solving the problems of poverty, education, gender equality and economic growth.⁹ These initiatives have enhanced digital literacy and facilitated access to key services, markets and information for the rural population through analysis of government initiatives such as Digital India and PMGDISHA (Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan).¹⁰ The high adoption of the internet from 18% in 2015 to 37% in 2022 has enabled increased use of e-

⁷ Behera, B., & Gaur, M. (2022). Skill Development Training Fueling Employability in India, *Journal of Xidian University*, 16(2), 332-347. <https://icrrd.com/public/media/14-03-2022-005110Skill-Development-Training.pdf>.

⁸ Pandey, A., Moti, S., & Naomi, S. S. (2025). Educating for social justice lawyering and community legal empowerment: Learnings from India and Bangladesh. *Asian Journal of Legal Education*, 12(1), 25-39. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23220058241289261>.

⁹ Kolkman, D., Bex, F., Narayan, N., & van der Put, M. (2024). Justitia ex machina: The impact of an AI system on legal decision-making and discretionary authority. *Big Data & Society*, 11(2).

¹⁰ Sinha, N., & Dutta, M. (2025). Community policing in India – Prospects and challenges. *The Police Journal: Theory, Practice and Principles*, 98(4), 756-780.

commerce, digital learning and financial services. Enhancing digital literacy skills to effectively and safely use technology is a key element in closing this gap. Digital literacy is even more important in rural India, where access to technology is limited. It helps rural people gain access to basic services (including health, education, and financial services), and to participate in economic activities not available to them before.

3.4. Women's Empowerment through Training Interventions

Using the survey data of 6989 women below the poverty line in India who are employed, the research explores the connection between the digital skills training program and empowerment. The study of economic empowerment in terms of employment, education and entrepreneurship seeking behavior, and psychological empowerment is conducted. Results show that the moderating role of perceived value is important for economic empowerment and the mediating role of actual usage of learned digital skills is relevant for psychological empowerment.¹¹ Digital literacy training may lead to empowerment for poor women. Eight blocks of District Gumla, Jharkhand received a Digital literacy training programme for three years from 2017-2020.¹²

For the girls, in the endline, mean score for girls in intervention arm (n=362, 90%) significantly increased compared to mean score for girls in comparison arm (n=84, 41.6%). The percentage of girls achieving post-education, having physical access to ICT devices at home and/or feeling physically safe rose in the intervention group. A significantly higher proportion of girls had knowledge about government schemes in the intervention arm as compared to comparison arm at the endline ($p < 0.05$). Such tailor-made training programs which are weaved within cultural contexts can effectively bridge the digital gaps in resource scarce settings.¹³

3.5. Self-Help Groups as Platforms for Empowerment

Self Help Groups (SHGs) have become one of the significant institutional tools to promote women empowerment in developing countries. Although they are recognized for their contributions to the financial inclusion, their contribution to social participation and legal

¹¹ Dutta, A. (2023). Digital payment trends, issues and opportunities in India. *Anusandhan*, 5(2), 27-36. <https://doi.org/10.56411/anusandhan.2023.v5i2.27-36>.

¹² Babbar J. (2022). Women Empowerment, *Research Journal of English*, 7(1), 118-121. [https://www.rjoe.org.in/Files/v7i1/24.RJOE-Jyoti\(118-121\).pdf](https://www.rjoe.org.in/Files/v7i1/24.RJOE-Jyoti(118-121).pdf).

¹³ Bhat R.M. (2022). Women Exploitation in the Contemporary India: Importance of Media to Impede it. *JWES*, 2(02), 27-30. <https://journal.hmjournals.com/index.php/JWES>.

awareness is not well studied. SHGs are an important factor in the improvement of economic empowerment in rural and urban settings. Yet, social and legal empowerment are unequal among the urban and rural women,¹⁴ with the urban women having relatively higher social and legal empowerment because they have better institutional support and awareness programs. This has helped the women members in many ways, 82% of the respondents have benefited by improvement in their reading and writing skills, 90% women have agreed that they have seen their income increased after joining the SHGs and 46% women have been aware of the rights of women with regard to property. From results of SHG studies it has been found that with higher income generation and awareness of the women regarding their legal rights there is significant improvement in the role of women in household decision making and dispute resolution at a community level. SHGs are not just microfinance institutions, they are also agents of socio-political change.¹⁵

3.6. Barriers to Legal and Digital Empowerment

Although the legal provisions put in place under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA) and the state-level initiatives, research reveals some key gaps in knowledge, resources, and access to these services. It is difficult for victims to seek justice because of the complex interaction of cultural attitudes and institutional shortcomings. The results show that it is necessary to adopt a more comprehensive perspective that combines improved legal aid providers' training and resources, better education and awareness, and more collaboration among stakeholders. Although tribal women have more autonomy and social status than women in non-tribal communities, there is still a great deal of discrimination against them, as well as restricted rights to property, education and health care, and increasing violence against them.

Multiple laws are in place, yet significant awareness, education, and enforcement gaps exist, compelling a need for urgent, intersectional approaches and strategies for the holistic empowerment of tribal women in India.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To fully understand the effectiveness of the para-legal training in terms of social and economic

¹⁴ Malhotra, S., Anil, K., & Kaur, A. (2023). Impact of Social Entrepreneurship on Digital Technology and Students' Skill Set in Higher Education Institutions: A Structured Equation Model. *International Journal of Experimental Research and Review*, 35, 54-61. <https://doi.org/10.52756/ijerr.2023.v35spl.006>

¹⁵ Behera, B., & Gaur, M. (2022). Skill Development Training Fueling Employability in India, *Journal of Xidian University*, 16(2), 332-347. <https://icrrd.com/public/media/14-03-2022-005110Skill-Development-Training.pdf>.

empowerment, this study adopts a Doctrinal methods research design with qualitative approaches. The methodology is qualitative and includes document analysis (thematic and content) and in-depth group discussions. The methodology is based on detailed literature analysis on academic databases, government reports and relevant case studies of interventions to collect data on the effectiveness of interventions. The purpose of this methodological approach is to give a holistic evaluation of the contribution to empowerment of programs.

5. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Legal aid has a rich historical background and can be traced back in Indian history for a long time through old scriptures. Access to justice has been recognized as an international human right in Article 8 and 10, United Nations Declaration on Human Rights. The General Assembly in 2012 adopted the 'UN Principles and Guidelines on Access to Legal Aid in Criminal Justice System', which is considered to be the first legal instrument for providing legal aid rights. India is far ahead at the national level, and sees the provision of legal aid as an entitlement stemming from a right to access to justice. The fundamental rights are identified through the active role of judiciary in the constitution of India (art.21 and art.14). Article 39A specifically states the state's duty towards providing legal aid.¹⁶

Public interest litigation (PIL) is in line with Article 39A of the Indian Constitution which aims at preservation and prompt social justice through law. The Apex Court and the High Courts have extended the definition of fundamental rights in Articles 14, 21 and 32, as they have dealt with topics ranging from conservation of the environment, gender justice, transparency and governance to human rights. The aim of this unit is to examine the constitutional implications of Article 21 and Legal Aid.

The key statutory provisions like the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, the constitutional cover under Article 39A of the Constitution of India and specific provisions in the recently enacted Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 are explored. In the judicial sphere, seminal cases like *Hussainara Khatoon v. State of Bihar*¹⁷, *Supreme Court Legal Aid Committee v.*

¹⁶ Nair, S. B., Sivaprasad, B., & Shaji, S. (2023). Attaining access to justice through legal aid mechanism: Leaving no one behind in modern era. *Journal of Survey in Fisheries Sciences*, 10(1), 17239–17244. <https://doi.org/10.53555/sfs.v10i1.3380>

¹⁷ *Hussainara Khatoon v. State of Bihar*, AIR 1979 SC 1369 (Supreme Court of India 1979).

Union of India,¹⁸ *Sheela Barse v. State of Maharashtra*¹⁹ and more recent ones are discussed and examined from the lens of judicial understanding and application of the statutory right. The article reveals that although statute creates the building blocks for free legal aid, judicial decisions have over time added to the scope, applicability and enforcement tools of free legal aid. The provisional finding in this case is that India has a robust legal structure which guarantees the rights of undertrial prisoners, but the practice of ensuring these guarantees is not robust. The gaps are addressed by the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, which provides for the establishment of a multi-level chain of legal aid institutions at the national, state, district and taluka levels. The Act promotes accessible and affordable justice with the help of Lok Adalats, the schemes for human trafficking victims, the acid attack victims, undertrial prisoners, senior citizens and women.

It is encouraging accessible and affordable justice through Lok Adalats, schemes for human trafficking victims, acid attack victims, undertrial prisoners, senior citizens and women. The Constitutional mandate of access to justice is further reinforced by judicial recognition, in the case of *Anita Kushwaha v. Pushpa Sudan*²⁰ (2016). However, many obstacles remain, such as geographical, bureaucratic, socio-economic, low legal literacy, and quality inconsistencies in legal aid services, still affecting the effective implementation of the measures. The Legal & Para-Legal Services have got the most special and primary role in administration of justice in delivery of justice.²¹ It has the highest goal of justice, with Law being the medium. The actual/reality/actual conditions, and/or other facts related to Legal & Para-Legal Services as conducted, legal and/or Para-Legal aid clinics, Para-Legal Training, Education, Literacy, Accessibility, Paralegals, Volunteers & other related things. The COVID-19 pandemic pushed India towards digitalization, and technology is now being used in many sectors like education and law²². There is a particular challenge in making the University-based law clinics online and still retain their client-centred approach, an important role in training future lawyers and delivering Legal Aid. The transition from paper to electronic also offered a chance to enhance access to justice and to modernize legal education, but it also revealed problems with access,

¹⁸ *Supreme Court Legal Aid Committee Representing Undertrial Prisoners v. Union of India*, (1994) 6 SCC 731 (Supreme Court of India 1994).

¹⁹ *Sheela Barse v. State of Maharashtra*, (1983) 2 SCC 96 (Supreme Court of India 1983).

²⁰ Sharma, P. (2018). Continuing Legal Education: Rethinking Professional Ethics and Responsibility in India. *Asian Journal of Legal Education*, 5(2), 152-168.

²¹ Pandey, A., Moti, S., & Naomi, S. S. (2025). Educating for Social Justice Lawyering and Community Legal Empowerment: Learnings from India and Bangladesh. *Asian Journal of Legal Education*, 12(1), 25-39.

²² Pandey, A., Chandra, S., & Moti, S. (2024). Clinical Legal Education and Access to Justice During and Beyond COVID-19: Some Reflections of Indian Experience. *Asian Journal of Legal Education*, 11(1), 7-19.

implementation and effectiveness. To overcome the justice gap, virtual legal education, online legal aid services and digital legal clinics have been adopted, but many of these are underutilized, inefficient, and inaccessible by marginalized communities. Tele-Law, an initiative in India, is based on the Information and Communication Technology and offers legal support to the out-of-reach communities via Community Service Centers. This paper assesses the status of the implementation of the Tele-Law scheme and its impact on access to justice, with a particular interest in the role of ICT in improving access to justice in rural and marginalised communities. The results reveal noteworthy enhancements of legal access for rural communities.²³ The study found that there were some challenges in the implementation of the Tele-Law scheme including digital literacy, lack of infrastructure and systemic barriers. Recommendations include reengineering the current implementation process and suggest strategies to improve the scheme's reach and efficiency by adding additional tools to integrate ICT into the Tele-Law program.

Access to ICTs had a very significant impact on awareness about government schemes, digital literacy and on self-help group participation. Women who used the ICTs frequently experienced greater confidence, better health-seeking practices, and increased economic opportunities, particularly in accessing markets and engaging in home-based businesses. But financial constraints, caste and class inequalities and inadequate infrastructure are still preventing equitable inclusion. Policy initiatives such as Digital India, Mahila E-Haat and NRLM were identified as relevant, but not widely used because of a lack of bottom-up implementation.²⁴

There are multiple initiatives of the government for strengthening women empowerment including PMGDISHA (Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan), Digital Saksharta Abhiyan, Stand Up India and Mahila E-Haat. These initiatives have contributed to the economic and technological empowerment of women, but there are still numerous obstacles to overcome. Legal clinics are used for two purposes: training students in the practical aspects of the law; and bringing people to justice where it is hard to reach and provide legal assistance.

²³ Rajashree, K. (2021). Dissecting the Dichotomy of Skill and Social Justice Theory of Law School Legal Aid Clinics in the USA and India: A Re-look of the Past and the Present. *Asian Journal of Legal Education*, 8(1), 79-94.

²⁴ Chakraborty, A., & Ghosh, Y. (2015). Promoting Continuing Legal Education: A Step towards Implementing the Second Generation Legal Reforms for Creating Competent Lawyers in the New Century. *Asian Journal of Legal Education*, 2(1), 29-45.

SHGs not only help in financial enhancement but also in social recognition and gaining confidence. AI-powered legal aid platforms can help users ask legal questions in their own language, such as Hindi and regional dialects²⁵ and get clear, simplified answers based on accurate legal sources like the Indian Constitution, statutory laws and precedent-setting court rulings. By making legal rights understandable and accessible regardless of a user's location, economic status, or education, such platforms advance the Digital India initiative and foster social empowerment, enhance civic awareness, and contribute to a more just and equitable society.²⁶

6. CONCLUSION

This research paper has given a detailed model for the study of the effectiveness of para-legal trainings and how it can contribute to the social and economic empowerment in India's digital economy. State to provide access to justice, particularly for the poor. Law schools have an important role to play in providing solutions to this crisis. Clinical legal education programme in law schools, with their mission of providing skill-based training to law students, and legal services to underserved communities are well positioned to respond to the needs of access to justice. The combination of legal literacy, digital literacy and economic opportunity is fraught with challenges and opportunities. Though cyber space is often believed to be a neutral environment, deep-rooted gender biases and systematic obstacles persist in women's digital experiences. Addressing these challenges, a digital gender divide in the digital economy can be bridged with substantive gender equality and sustainable development in India. This study is important because it will help the policy makers, schools and the legal community to understand the need of a revamped and inclusive para-legal education system in India which can lead to a more equitable justice delivery system. This study seeks to help the broader effort of making India digitally inclusive, including the documentation of successful practices and identifying persistent barriers to such a change, which will benefit especially the historically marginalized population.

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- ²⁵ Farber, S. (2026). Machines of justice: A systematic review of AI applications in policing and criminal justice. *The Police Journal: Theory, Practice and Principles*, 0(0).
- ²⁶ Gupta, S., & Moti, S. (2024). Missing the Wood for the Trees: How Indian Legal Education Fails to Deliver the Professional Lawyer? *Asian Journal of Legal Education*, 11(1), 60-73

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