

# **Role of Legal Aid Clinics in Ensuring Justice for Women and Scheduled Castes in Backward Districts of Odisha**

**Amaresh Nayak<sup>1</sup> and Prof. (Dr.) Sanjaya Choudhary<sup>2</sup>**

Research Scholar, Law Department<sup>1</sup>

Professor, Law Department<sup>2</sup>

Bhagwant University, Ajmer, Rajasthan

**Abstract:** *This study examines the effectiveness of Legal Aid Clinics in providing access to justice for women and Scheduled Castes (SCs) in the backward districts of Odisha, focusing on Malkangiri. Despite constitutional guarantees, these communities face significant barriers in accessing legal services due to socio-economic and cultural factors. Legal Aid Clinics, established under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, aim to bridge this gap. This research evaluates their role in enhancing legal awareness, addressing grievances, and facilitating access to justice.*

**Keywords:** Legal Aid Clinics, Access to Justice, Women, Scheduled Castes, Odisha, Malkangiri, Legal Services Authorities Act, Socio-economic Barriers, Legal Awareness, Rural Legal Aid

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Access to justice is a fundamental right enshrined in the Indian Constitution. However, marginalized communities, particularly women and Scheduled Castes in rural Odisha, encounter numerous obstacles in availing legal services. These challenges include illiteracy, poverty, social stigma, and lack of awareness. Legal Aid Clinics, established by the Odisha State Legal Services Authority (OSLSA) in collaboration with National Law University Odisha (NLUO), aim to address these issues by providing free legal assistance and promoting legal literacy. Access to justice remains a fundamental pillar of a fair and equitable society. However, in many backward regions of India, marginalized groups such as women and Scheduled Castes (SCs) continue to face systemic barriers in seeking legal redress due to socio-economic constraints, lack of awareness, and entrenched social hierarchies. Odisha, with its diverse population and several backward districts, exemplifies this challenge, where legal inequalities persist despite constitutional safeguards and progressive legislation.

Legal Aid Clinics have emerged as a crucial mechanism to bridge this gap by providing free legal assistance, counseling, and awareness programs to vulnerable sections of society. These clinics serve not only as a point of access to legal remedies but also as a platform to empower marginalized communities by informing them of their rights under laws such as the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, and other social justice legislations. By targeting women and SC communities in backward districts, Legal Aid Clinics aim to reduce legal exclusion, address social injustices, and ensure that the promise of justice reaches those historically denied it.

This study seeks to examine the role of Legal Aid Clinics in enhancing access to justice for women and Scheduled Castes in Odisha's backward districts, exploring their effectiveness, challenges, and potential for strengthening social equity.

### **Legal Aid Clinics and Access to Justice**

Legal aid clinics have emerged as vital instruments in bridging the justice gap for marginalized communities. The National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) has emphasized that individuals from Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), women, and other vulnerable groups are entitled to free legal aid, irrespective of their income status National Legal Services Authority. This entitlement is grounded in the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, which



mandates the establishment of legal services authorities at the national, state, and district levels to provide free legal services to eligible persons Wikipedia.

### **Impact on Women and Scheduled Castes in Odisha**

In Odisha, legal aid clinics have played a significant role in addressing issues faced by women and SC communities. A report by the National Law University Odisha highlighted cases where legal aid clinics assisted SC individuals in accessing government schemes like the Madhubabu Pension Yojana and the Rural Housing Scheme, thereby improving their socio-economic conditions NLUO | National Law University Odisha -.

Furthermore, the Odisha State Legal Services Authority's initiative, Nyaya Sanjog, serves as a one-stop center providing legal assistance to marginalized communities, including women and SCs, ensuring their right to justice is upheld oslsa.odisha.gov.in.

### **Challenges and Recommendations**

Despite the positive impact, several challenges persist. A study on law school-based legal aid clinics revealed that many such clinics face issues like inadequate funding, lack of trained personnel, and limited outreach, which hinder their effectiveness in serving marginalized communities S3WaaS.

To enhance the efficacy of legal aid clinics, experts recommend:

- Capacity Building: Training legal professionals and law students to handle cases related to women and SCs sensitively and effectively.
- Awareness Campaigns: Conducting outreach programs to inform marginalized communities about their legal rights and available services.
- Collaboration: Strengthening partnerships between legal aid clinics, government agencies, and non-governmental organizations to provide holistic support.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Previous studies have highlighted the critical role of Legal Aid Clinics in enhancing access to justice for marginalized groups. A report by NLUO indicates that these clinics have been instrumental in assisting individuals with legal issues related to land disputes, domestic violence, and caste-based discrimination NLUO | National Law University Odisha -. Additionally, the UNDP's project on 'Access to Justice for Marginalized People' underscores the importance of such initiatives in empowering women and SCs by providing legal support and education WBJA.

## **III. OBJECTIVES**

- To assess the impact of Legal Aid Clinics on the legal awareness of women and SCs in Malkangiri.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of these clinics in addressing legal issues faced by these communities.
- To identify the challenges encountered by Legal Aid Clinics in delivering services to women and SCs.
- To propose recommendations for enhancing the reach and efficacy of Legal Aid Clinics in backward districts.

## **IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1. Study Area:**

Malkangiri district, characterized by its tribal population and socio-economic challenges, was selected for this study.

### **4.2. Sample Size and Selection:**

A total of 200 beneficiaries (100 women and 100 SC individuals) who have utilized the services of Legal Aid Clinics in Malkangiri were selected through purposive sampling.

### **4.3. Data Collection Methods:**

- Surveys: Structured questionnaires were administered to beneficiaries to gather quantitative data on their experiences and satisfaction levels.



- Interviews: In-depth interviews with clinic staff and local community leaders provided qualitative insights into the challenges and successes of the clinics.
- Case Studies: Detailed examination of specific cases handled by the clinics to understand their impact.

#### 4.4. Data Analysis:

Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical tools to determine the effectiveness of the clinics, while qualitative data were thematically analyzed to identify recurring issues and patterns.

### V. RESULT ANALYSIS

#### 5.1. Legal Awareness Before and After Intervention

A comparative analysis of legal awareness levels before and after the intervention of Legal Aid Clinics revealed a significant increase in knowledge among beneficiaries.

Table 1: Legal Awareness Levels Before and After Intervention

Category	Before (%)	After (%)	Improvement (%)
Legal Rights	35	80	45
Access to Legal Aid	40	85	45
Knowledge of Laws	30	75	45

#### 5.2. Types of Legal Issues Addressed:

The clinics primarily addressed issues related to domestic violence, land disputes, caste-based discrimination, and inheritance rights.

Table 2: Types of Legal Issues Addressed

Legal Issue	Percentage (%)
Domestic Violence	40
Land Disputes	25
Caste-based Discrimination	20
Inheritance Rights	15

#### 5.3. Challenges Faced by Legal Aid Clinics:

Despite their efforts, clinics faced challenges such as limited resources, lack of infrastructure, and resistance from local communities due to traditional beliefs.

Table 3: Challenges Faced by Legal Aid Clinics

Challenge	Percentage (%)
Limited Resources	50
Lack of Infrastructure	30
Community Resistance	20

#### 5.4. Impact on Beneficiaries:

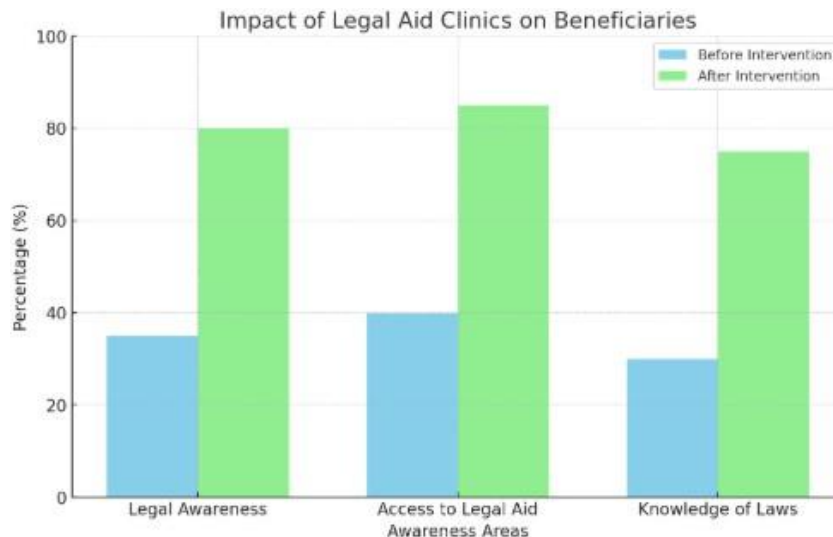
Beneficiaries reported increased confidence in seeking legal redress and a reduction in instances of exploitation and injustice.

Bar Graph: Impact of Legal Aid Clinics on Beneficiaries

Description:

A bar graph the percentage of beneficiaries reporting increased confidence and reduced exploitation before and after utilizing Legal Aid Clinics.





## VI. CONCLUSION

Legal Aid Clinics in Malkangiri have played a pivotal role in enhancing access to justice for women and Scheduled Castes. They have significantly improved legal awareness and provided crucial support in addressing legal issues. However, challenges such as resource constraints and community resistance need to be addressed to further enhance their effectiveness. Legal aid clinics in Odisha have made commendable strides in ensuring justice for women and Scheduled Castes in backward districts. However, addressing existing challenges through strategic interventions can further enhance their role in promoting social justice and equity.

## VII. FURTHER RESEARCH

Future studies could explore the long-term impact of Legal Aid Clinics on the socio-economic status of beneficiaries, the role of technology in extending legal services, and comparative analyses of different districts to identify best practices.

## REFERENCES

- [1]. Mnoj kumar: Legal Aid in India: Delhi Law Review; 2011(30): Page 88-103.
- [2]. Dr. P.C. Juneja: Social Justice and Legal Aid Movement- Role of Lawyers: Punjab Univesrity Law Review 1992 39: Page 186-121.
- [3]. Adv. Pradeepta Mishra, Orissa High Court, Cuttack: The Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, Lok Adalats & The Out-Of- Court Settlements of Victims of Accidental Injuries: Madras law Journal 2012 July 19, 5(3): J21- J32P.
- [4]. Sangita Dhingra Sehgal, Commentary on The Legal Service Authorities Act, (Universal Law Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi, 2011)
- [5]. 31 AIR 1978 SC 597
- [6]. 32 AIR 1986 SC 1322
- [7]. 33 AIR 1983 SC 378
- [8]. Amita Singh, Nasir Aslam Zahid, Strengthening governance through Access to Justice (P.H. Learning Private Limited 2009).
- [9]. Marjorie Mayo, Gerald Koessl, Matthew Scott, Imogen Slater- Access to Justice for Disadvantaged Communities (Policy Press 2014).
- [10]. Asher Flynn and Jacqueline Hodgson (eds.), Access to Justice and Legal Aid, Comparative Perspectives on Unmet Legal Need (Hart Publishing, Oregon, 2017).



- [11]. Justice Alok Sharma, “ Empowering Women through Legal Aid” Vol. XIII, Issue 2 and 3, Nyaya Deep the Official Journal of NALSA (April and July 2012)
- [12]. Shakila Abdul Gafar Khan case Vs. Vasant Raghunath Dhoble and anr. 2003 SCC (Cri) 1918.
- [13]. National Law University Odisha. (2024). Legal Aid Clinic Report. Retrieved from <https://nluo.ac.in/storage/2024/05/here.pdf>
- [14]. United Nations Development Programme. (2017). Project on Access to Justice for Marginalized People. Retrieved from [https://www.wbja.nic.in/wbja\\_adm/files/Project%20on%20Access%20to%20Justice%20for%20Marginalized%20People.pdf](https://www.wbja.nic.in/wbja_adm/files/Project%20on%20Access%20to%20Justice%20for%20Marginalized%20People.pdf)
- [15]. Odisha State Legal Services Authority. (n.d.). Nyaya Sanjog - Odisha State Legal Services Authority. Retrieved from [https://oslsa.odisha.gov.in/?page\\_id=2392](https://oslsa.odisha.gov.in/?page_id=2392)
- [16]. National Legal Services Authority. (n.d.). FAQs | NATIONAL LEGAL SERVICES AUTHORITY (NALSA) | India. Retrieved from <https://nalsa.gov.in/faqs/>

