

LEGAL LITERACY THROUGH LIBRARY SERVICES

Ram Kumar Dangi*, Prabhat Kumar Pandey**

Abstract *The Paper highlights the need of legal literacy to empower the common man so that they can avail their rights properly given to them by constitutions and through various schemes of government. The law is supposed to be understood and used by each and every citizen. It also Emphasis the services and functions of Library in creating an environment of information literacy among people so they may be able to know their rights and improve their living standards. Libraries, because of their importance as sources of current legal information can play an important role. The aim of this work is to sensitize the professionals to this need.*

Keyword: *Legal Literacy, Legal Education Programs, Law Education, Law Library, Public Library, Academic Law Library*

INTRODUCTION

The country has made tremendous progress and development but, at the same time, we all have to bear in mind that despite the guarantee of such high ideals and despite the provision of a truly comprehensive constitution to assist in achieving these ideals, we seem to have fallen short of many of our goals towards a large section of the society. We are still a country where millions of people live in conditions of poverty, with millions living in conditions where they are without the most basic of their needs fulfilled. Unfortunately, this class is far away from achieving many of the ideals laid down in our constitution. And it is not only the constitution. A number of statutory provisions have been made allowing for social welfare schemes and other legislative measures to alleviate the vast deprivation in our society. Yet, these programs too often have been unable to reach those most in need. It is my firm belief that laws or legal institutions will not be completely effective as an instrumentality geared to deal with issues of poverty or deprivations unless we first strengthen the mechanism of legal aid and advice

LEGAL LITERACY

Legal information is basic to all, both lawyers and non-lawyers. Parliament does not enact laws for the exclusive use of lawyers. The law is supposed to be understood and used by each and every citizen. The Government and the law in particular, expect every citizen to be knowledgeable in all matters pertaining to the law. Legal literacy enables people to perform their work effectively and within legal boundaries. Another category of users of legal information

comprises *pro-se* patrons. *Pro-se* patrons are individuals who opt to conduct their own cases in court, or other places where the services of lawyers would have been useful. Because they conduct their own cases, they are compelled to do practically all the work that lawyers do including legal research. With the rising cost of hiring lawyers and court expenses characteristic of the Third World, a number of people have attempted to go it alone.

Legal literacy means making people aware of their rights, and then by making the people literate, we would essentially be taking the first step in empowering them to fight for their rights. Our society is filled with various categories of persons whose rights are violated on a daily basis and these persons are unable to take any action to remedy this situation simply because they aren't even aware that they are assured certain rights.

Finally, any ordinary member of the public needs to be legally informed. The law in any country pre-supposes that every citizen despite his/her age, education, etc. is legally literate; that he is aware of all codes of legislation enacted in the state. To meet this challenge, the citizen needs to keep himself abreast of all changes taking place in the law. Above all, he needs to be legally informed to remain a law abiding citizen.

INFORMATION NEED IN LEGAL LITERACY

Libraries continue to use them simply because of their importance as sources of current legal information. Japhet

* Assistant Librarian, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India. Email: dangi03@yahoo.com

** Librarian & Head, Deptt. of Library & Inf. Sc., Sarojini Naidu Govt. Girls PG College, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India
Email: pkumarp11@gmail.com

Otike (1997) explained that for legal literacy, people do not require complex legal information materials. Their needs are confined to materials that are easy to read and comprehend. Among these are academic books. Textbooks are used mainly by students either studying for law degrees or professionals such as accountants who may wish to refresh themselves on some issues of the law such as contracts, hire purchase, sale of goods, etc. Other sources like Legal periodicals, Statutes and subsidiary legislation materials are heavily used. Both local and foreign materials are consulted. Case law materials are also frequently used. Reference materials such as legal encyclopedias, dictionaries, directories, etc. are consulted by non-lawyers. Newspaper collections are heavily used. Newspapers, in addition to highlighting current events, carry summaries of latest judgments decided in superior courts locally and overseas. Newspapers act as an important current awareness source.

LEGAL LITERACY AND LIBRARY SERVICES IN INDIA

Libraries can create an environment of information literacy among people, so they may be able to know their rights and improve their living standard. After knowing the rule and regulations, right and duties, they become well informed citizens. Library activities and services are always users centered. Libraries already try to provide best services to all its users. Librarians themselves are doing all the jobs keeping in mind users need. So, even before being asked by the users, Librarians are ready to provide information to them.

In the developed states, the needs of non-lawyers can be met by law libraries. However, this should not be considered as a general or universal policy. The use of library resources by the public greatly depends on the policies of the individual libraries. In the USA and Canada, for instance, a number of law libraries in academic institutions and law courts are open to the public. In addition, public libraries have set up specialized law collections for public use. Some states in the USA have established state law libraries for use by lawyers as well as non-lawyers. Where a public library is unable to obtain a specific title, an effort is made to secure the title elsewhere. So, as far as the developed states are concerned, accessibility to legal information by the public has never been a problem.

In India, accessibility to legal information has been and will continue to be a major problem. Most of people of the country are unable to meet the basic needs of life. Very little amount have been invested in information development. The result is that libraries and information services are relatively undeveloped. Public libraries can hardly afford to acquire and maintain legal materials. The best a public library can

do is to acquire a set of local statutes. However, such a set is risky to use if it is never updated.

ACADEMIC LAW LIBRARIES AND LEGAL LITERACY

Law libraries in academic institutions rarely allow members of the public to use their services. The resources of most institutions are already stretched to the limit by the student population. Because of this, they are unable to take an additional load.

SPECIAL LAW LIBRARIES AND LEGAL LITERACY

Although libraries in government departments and law courts are fairly well stocked, they do not encourage the use of their resources by the public. From the above account, it appears evident that an ordinary member of the public has practically nowhere to satisfy his thirst for legal information. The public library still remains an ideal source of legal information for the public despite its limitation. Some public libraries have limited numbers of legal titles. Many of these titles are designed for beginners or laymen. Some titles may be of an academic nature as most users of public libraries are students. In addition to legal titles, some libraries are bound to have sets of local statutes.

Departments such as those of the Attorney-General, Law Commission, Parliament, etc. have law libraries. Access to these libraries is restricted to members of the legal profession and staff of that department, irrespective of their speciality. Non-legal staff can take advantage of this privilege to make use of information resources in government departments. Although academic libraries restrict their services to the academic staff and students of that institution, they are accessible to nonacademic staff as well. Former students of the university are also allowed access. Some law libraries allow access to members of certain professions in special cases. Media staff, for instance, may be given access to write documentaries for newspapers, radio or television programmes. The above are some of the many ways the public can access law libraries.

PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM AND LEGAL LITERACY

In those state where Public Library Act implemented and public library system functioning, the citizens are having the rights to get the information. If they are not getting information in time they may go to court of law. For improvement of legal literacy among people, there is a need of strong Public Library System in each and every state.

Since the responsibility for providing legal information to the public, the public libraries should take over the task of providing legal information to the public. The argument here is that the public generally do not require such sophisticated information materials as those demanded by lawyers. As their needs are confined to simple legal texts and handbooks, as well as basic reference books, their requirements can be appropriately addressed by public libraries. Second, the public library has by all means to provide this service in compliance with the Unesco Public Library Manifesto. According to this document, the public library has the duty to inform and educate the public in all areas of their endeavour. In other words, the public library is supposed to serve as the people's university with accessibility to all members of the public.

ALTERNATIVE SOURCES

Legal Aid Centres

Another source of legal information can be legal aid centres. Legal aid centres exist in some states to provide legal advice and services to the financially handicapped. A number of them maintain basic collections of legal materials to assist their staff. The centres obtain funding from local and overseas sources. Book donations are also requested. These information sources, if properly developed, could form ideal sources of reference for the public. In particular, they should be able to serve *pro-se* patrons as well as the common man. The *pro-se* patron should be able to find adequate literature on case law and statutes to assist him to conduct his case in court, while the common man should be able to find appropriate literature to enable him to be legally informed.

Clinical Legal Education Program

The Law Colleges runs legal clinics in their premises by the help of law teachers and law students. Each clinic provides students with work experience in a legal setting for academic credit. The law faculty, BHU is also running legal in evening times. General people can get help from the legal clinic. These legal clinics also provide legal information and literate people about legal rights and laws.

CONCLUSIONS

Libraries have a responsibility to serve the public. The provision of legal information to the public in the India still remains largely unresearched. Until extensive empirical research is conducted in this vast area, information professionals will continue to rely heavily on simple hypotheses. The aim of this work is to sensitize the professionals to this need, and the sooner this can be done the better it will be for the advancement of the information profession. Law libraries in the country have adequate resources and infrastructure to disseminate legal information to its users. These services may be extended to general people. Law libraries make it easier to share out nonacademic users. Moreover, a number of states have such elaborate chains of public libraries which are so well stocked and financed that only a limited number of people opt to go to law school libraries.

REFERENCES

- Mizan, A. S. (2016). North South University, Challenges of Street law in developing countries: lessons from Bangladesh on promoting human rights and legal literacy amongst common citizens, Street Law Conference, Durban.
- Bruintjies, C. (2016). South African Constitutional Literacy and Service Initiative (CLASI), Using law students as 'teaching fellows' to promote the South African Constitution, Street Law Conference, Durban.
- Lemmer, C. A. (2013). A View from the Flip Side: Using the "Inverted Classroom" to Enhance the Legal Information Literacy of the International LL.M. Student. *Law Library Journal*, 105(4).
- Decker, J. R., & Brady, K. P. (2015). Increasing School employees' special education legal literacy. *Journal of School Public Relations*, 36(3), 231-259, p.29
- Otike, J. (1997). *Legal information needs of the general public with special reference to developing countries*. *Library Review*, 46(1), 28-33.
- Dol, N., Bakar, E. A., & Sai, A. M. (2015). Consumer Legal Literacy, Values and Consumerism Practices among Members of Consumer Association in Malaysia. *Asian Social Science* 11(12).