

## Career as Paralegal Volunteer

The father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhi desired that the benefit derived out of any action of the authority should be reached to the "poorest of the remotest village". The vision of Gandhiji is yet to be fulfilled as the benefit from the legal service has not been arrived to the poorest persons from the remotest village of the country.

Poverty, Illiteracy and Physical distance are found to be the major inarticulate barrier for "*access to justice*" to the citizens of India. As per the census report of 2011, 68.84% of the total populations of the country are the inhabitant of village areas. Out of these inhabitants 33.8% persons are living below the poverty line.

Article 39 A of the constitution of India directs the state to ensure the delivery of free legal aid to all citizens of India. Further the Article has said that it should not be denied to any citizen on the ground of economic or other disabilities.

With the change of the concept of the legal service in India from "court annexed layer-based legal services" to "a need based people friendly system", the importance of Paralegal Volunteer (PLV) has emerged in the society during recent times.

National Legal Service Authority (NLSA) has brought out a Scheme namely "Para Legal Volunteers Scheme"(PLVS) in 2009 which aimed at imparting legal training to selected volunteers from different walks of life. The volunteers will ensure the delivery of legal aid to all sections of people and thereby ultimately will remove the barriers into "access to justice".

35 numbers of State Legal Service Authority (SLSA) has already been constituted in every state of the country and in every high court; a High Court Legal Service Committee has been formed. The prime aim of these committees is to make the citizens of the country aware about their rights and encourage them to go for "access to justice". Further District Legal Service Authority (DLSA) and Taluk Legal Service Authority (TLSA) have been made up in every district and taluk of the country respectively.

The PLV are expected to act as intermediaries who will bridge the gap between the common people and the legal service institutions. It may be mentioned here that since the condition of India is different from that of western countries, hence the westernize concept of 'Paralegals Professionals' cannot be wholly adopted in India. It should be more like a bridge course conceptualized in a simple and need-based module.

The PLVs are being trained in the basics of different Laws which would be applicable at the grass-root level with reference to the day-to-day life. With the basic knowledge in the laws and other available welfare measures and legislation, they would be able to assist their immediate neighborhoods who are in need of such assistance.

The PLV will create awareness for the right of the citizens of the country and will make the later understand of their legitimate rights and will also provide assistance to have access to the measures involving implementation of such rights. It may be mentioned here that NALSA launched legal service clinics in 2648 villages across the country on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2014.

The PLVs are not only expected to impart awareness on laws and the legal system, but they will be trained to counsel and to amicably settle simple disputes between the parties at the source itself, and thus can save the aggrieved parties from the of travelling of all the way to the Legal Service Institutions.

If the dispute is of such a nature, which cannot be resolved at the source with the assistance of PLVs, they can bring such parties to Legal Service Institutions, where, with the assistance of the competent authority can be availed to refer the matter of dispute to the Lok-Adalat or Mediation Centre.

### **Who can be selected as Para-Legal Volunteers**

PLV may be selected from any categories of the society like Teachers, Retired Government Servants, senior citizens, MSW students, Doctors, Anganwadi workers , Students of Law, Educated prisoners with good behavior, serving long term sentences in prisons, members of NGO,SHG etc.

### **What is taught to PLV**

PLVs are provided exposures of generating Legal Awareness in respect of constitutional and statutory rights and duties. Further they are trained to handle issues related to Women, Children, Students, Farmers, Industrial and Agriculture labour, Prisoners, Victims of natural disaster, Physically challenged, including persons suffering from Mental disorder and mentally retarded persons, Victims of Trafficking i.e. Women and Children as well as those suffering from HIV, Members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Bonded Labour, Consumers,Senior Citizens etc.

### **Scope for engagement of PLV**

As per the provisions of PLVS, the services of PLV may be availed in the Taluk Legal Service Committee, District Legal service Authority, Legal Aid Clinic etc.

### **Provisions for payment of Honorarium:**

There is provision for payment of Honorarium to the PLV for the services rendered by them.

As the natures of services to be rendered by PLV are social type, hence the career is most suited for the persons who are not considering it as a mode of income. It is good for the persons with mind set up of providing assistance to the needy and marginalized section of the society.

The importance of the PLVs has come into notice when the Supreme Court of India gave its verdict in *Sampurna Behrua Vs. Union of India & Others* ( W.P. ( C ) No 473/2005) against " child exploitation". A recent study said that 6.45 lakhs of citizens of India were benefited from the legal aids service during the period from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011 to 30th September 2011.

The PLVs' contribution have been highly appreciated when they assist the villagers in obtaining BPL Cards, Election Identity Card, Aadhaar card , gas connection and other government welfare schemes during recent times.

Effective implementation of PLVS will certainly help the weaker and needy sections of the society in getting justice in time and encourage all section of people to exercise their legitimate rights by approaching the legal service institutions.