
SCHEMES FOR ENFORCEMENT OF SINGLE WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 was enacted to

- Provide Free & Competent Legal Services to weaker sections of the society.
- Ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disabilities.
- To organize Lok Adalats to secure that the operation of legal system promotes justice on basis of equal opportunity.

Aforesaid Act was enacted to achieve the goals enshrined in directive principle contained in Article 39 A of the Constitution, added by 42nd Amendment Act, 1976 in order to ensure equal justice as promised to all citizens by the preamble and to further the guarantee of equality before law, which was meaningless to a poor man as long as he was unable to pay for his legal advisor.

Section 12 of the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 to be read with Rule 19 of the Haryana State Legal Services Authorities Rules, 1996 provide the criteria for giving legal services. Amongst other category of people, women, irrespective of their financial or social status, are entitled to free legal services, which include rendering of any service in the conduct of any case or other legal proceedings before any Court/Authority and giving of advice on any legal matter.

Women constitute strategic segment of the society and our constitution provides for support mechanism in the shape of protective discrimination for them. However, despite various schemes of social upliftment and programmes of women empowerment, much is still to be done. It is felt that even amongst women, a large segment of single women, (who include abandoned, widowed, deserted, separated, unmarried and divorced) is more vulnerable to atrocities & general discrimination and is deprived of reaping the fruits of legal aid benefits, for want of awareness or due to illiteracy.

Recently, a report appeared in a leading Daily Newspaper "Tribune" on 16th October, 2011 highlighting the plight of such single women. It was reported that there are 36 million single women in India according to 2001 census, numbering more than the population of Canada. This figure is only of those single women, who are legally divorced, separated and widowed. As per the report, a survey was conducted by 'National forum for single women's rights', which found that 75% of the sampled women lived on less than minimum daily wages in their states and yet only 21% of them were actually recognized as poor by the Government. The single women who include widows, divorcees, separated, deserted and unmarried are part of work force, which is mostly unorganized, majority of whom find the going tough. Particularly, in rural areas, they

have to constantly battle not only societal prejudices but also have to fight for survival. The atrocities faced by widowed women on the part of their in-laws after the death of husband are more acute, as they are caught between rigid social & religious customs. There is no official estimate of abandoned, deserted and unmarried women, multitudes of whom live invisibly, often at the mercy of callous family customs and beyond the reach of public welfare.

The challenges faced by the single women are manifold. They are not only vulnerable as both physical and financial insecurity stalks their existence but often face overt discrimination. Many such women despite technically heading the households being providers for their children, are hardly named as heads of families in ration cards. Only some of them receive social security benefits.

Haryana State Legal Services Authority has implemented scheme of Para-legal Volunteers. These volunteers are expected to act as intermediaries/bridge between the common people and legal services institutions and thereby removing the barriers of “Access to Justice”. Besides this, Haryana State Legal Services Authority has opened legal aid clinics in cluster of villages of all the Districts of Haryana, which are manned by Para-legal Volunteers and Panel Advocates.

It is felt that in order to ameliorate the condition of single women and to help them achieve their rights; our Para-legal Volunteers can visit every village falling under the area of their operation and identify such single women so as to provide necessary legal services to them. Considering the fact that single women may not be in a position to approach legal services institutions, our effort should be to reach them as “Access to Just for all” is our motto.

Apart from this, it is felt that no woman will be able to assert her right, unless she is aware about the same. Therefore, it will be the duty of Para-legal Volunteers to make such women aware about their rights particularly to make them aware how to claim their rights to land and other property; how to claim maintenance; how to break with the traditions in their caste or community; to guaranteed wage equal to that of men, which will help them afford food, better nutrition and shelter.

Para-legal Volunteers (female) will further help single women to approach the concerned authorities for issuance of ration cards, old age pension, job card, BPL cards etc and to claim maintenance and property rights. Para –Legal Volunteers / Panel Advocates will also create awareness amongst such single women about their constitutional & statutory rights and further apprise them of the various schemes of this Authority or NALSA and other social security governmental schemes, which are beneficial to them. Educated or otherwise interested single women may also be trained as Para Legal Volunteers; as such women will be more helpful in providing succor to similarly placed single women.

It is hoped that by said effort of legal services authorities, various kinds of atrocities faced by single women can be avoided. Said efforts will be helpful in bringing to the fore the problems of this marginalized section of the society and ensure that benefits of statutory provisions and social security schemes reach these needy women without any hiccups.

In view of the all above, it is proposed that directions be sent to all the District & Sessions Judge/Additional District & Sessions Judge-I-cum- Chairmen, District Legal Services Authorities in Haryana, to direct **female** Para-legal Volunteers of their respective districts to visit every village falling under the area of their operation (cluster) and to identify the single women and provide them all sort of legal services, whichever is required and to help/guide them to approach legal services institutions, if and when it is required to assert their rights. Special workshops may also be conducted to make these women aware of their rights. Interested women of this segment of society may also be trained as 'Para Legal Volunteers'.

OR

Any other order as your lordship feels proper.

Sd/-
(Deepak Gupta)
Member Secretary,
HALSA

Sd/-
Hon'ble Executive Chairman