Polity & Governance · GS - II

Who are entitled to receive free legal aid? Assess the role of the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) in rendering free legal aid in India.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2023	GS - II	Polity & Governance

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
10	~150 words

Answer Hint

Free legal aid operationalises equality before law by removing economic and social barriers to justice; NALSA institutionalises this constitutional commitment through legal representation, awareness, Lok Adalats and access-oriented mechanisms.

Model Answer

Introduction

Free legal aid is a constitutional instrument for ensuring equal access to justice. Article 39A directs the State to provide free legal aid so that justice is not denied because of economic or other disabilities.

Body

Persons Entitled to Free Legal Aid

Under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, eligible beneficiaries include:

1. Members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
2. Victims of trafficking or begar.
3. Women and children.
4. Persons with disabilities.
5. Victims of mass disaster, ethnic violence, caste atrocity, flood, drought, earthquake or industrial disaster.

6. Industrial workmen.
7. Persons in custody.
8. Persons below the prescribed income threshold.
9. Victims of trafficking or other circumstances specified under the Act.

Role of NALSA

Legal representation: It provides eligible persons access to lawyers and legal assistance.

Legal awareness: Through legal literacy programmes and awareness camps, it informs vulnerable groups about their rights.

Lok Adalats: NALSA facilitates Lok Adalats for speedy, inexpensive and conciliatory settlement of disputes.

Pre-litigation assistance: Legal Services Authorities provide advice and assistance even before formal litigation.

Victim support: It supports vulnerable victims through legal aid and compensation-related mechanisms.

Assessment

Despite substantial outreach, challenges include low awareness, uneven quality of legal representation, inadequate reach in remote areas and social hesitation among disadvantaged groups.

Conclusion

NALSA has transformed Article 39A from a constitutional directive into an institutional mechanism for accessible justice. Strengthening legal awareness, quality of representation and last-mile delivery can make legal aid more effective.

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