

---

## **Convergence of Legal Aid with Government Welfare Schemes: Enhancing Social Justice in Purvanchal Region of Uttar Pradesh**

---

*Shashank Shekhar Singh,  
Research Scholar,  
SOLS, Sangam University, Bhilwara*

*Dr. Vishwa Deepak Bhatnagar,  
Emeritus Professor,  
SOLS, Sangam University, Bhilwara*

### **ABSTRACT**

The provision of legal aid is a constitutional mandate and a fundamental pillar of access to justice in India. In economically and socially backward regions like Purvanchal, a culturally rich but historically underdeveloped area in eastern Uttar Pradesh, the convergence of legal aid with various government welfare schemes can be a transformative tool to enhance social justice. Despite the presence of numerous welfare programs targeting health, education, housing, and employment, the lack of legal awareness and accessibility impedes their effectiveness. This paper critically examines the structural gaps in the implementation of legal aid services in Purvanchal and proposes a model of integration with existing government welfare schemes. By exploring data, policy frameworks, and grassroots realities, the study aims to provide actionable suggestions to bridge the justice delivery gap in Purvanchal, thereby advancing equitable development and inclusive governance.

**Keywords:** Legal Aid, Social Justice, Welfare Schemes, Purvanchal, Access to Justice, NALSA, Legal Services Authorities Act, Grassroots Governance, Marginalised Communities, Convergence Strategy

### **INTRODUCTION**

Purvanchal, a region comprising the eastern districts of Uttar Pradesh, remains one of the most socio-economically backward areas in India. Characterised by poverty, illiteracy, high unemployment rates, caste-based marginalisation, and limited infrastructure, the region lags behind in various development indices. While the Indian government has initiated several welfare schemes aimed at improving living conditions, such as the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (housing), Ayushman Bharat (health), MNREGA (employment), and others, effective access and implementation remain major challenges.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Nikhil Dey & Aruna Roy, *Empowering the Marginalised: Legal Aid and the Right to Work in India*, 47(9) ECON. & POL. WKLY. 61 (2012).

Parallely, the legal aid framework in India, governed by the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, and implemented through bodies like the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) and State Legal Services Authorities (SLSA), aims to provide free legal services to weaker sections of society. However, in regions like Purvanchal, these services often function in isolation from broader welfare policies, resulting in fragmented outcomes and missed opportunities for systemic reform.

This paper argues for a convergence model where legal aid mechanisms are embedded within the structure and delivery of government welfare schemes. Such a model would ensure that the legal empowerment of citizens is not just about courtroom justice but about enabling people to claim their rightful entitlements under welfare policies, thus realising the broader constitutional promise of social justice.<sup>2</sup>

### **THEORETICAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF LEGAL AID AND SOCIAL JUSTICE**

The concept of legal aid has evolved from being a mechanism for courtroom representation into a more expansive tool of empowerment and inclusion. It is grounded in the broader ideal of social justice, a value enshrined in the Indian Constitution. Legal theorists such as Amartya Sen have argued for a capability-based approach to justice, wherein justice is not just about legal remedies but also about enabling individuals to function with dignity in society. In a similar vein, Upendra Baxi has conceptualised the idea of a “jurisprudence of suffering,” advocating for legal systems to respond to the lived experiences of marginalized communities. Within this framework, legal aid emerges as a crucial instrument to address structural inequalities and empower citizens to claim entitlements guaranteed under various welfare schemes.

The Preamble of the Indian Constitution promises justice, social, economic, and political, to all citizens. This promise is further reinforced through the DPSP, particularly Articles 38, 39, 41, and 46, which urge the state to strive towards eliminating inequalities, ensuring the right to work, education, and public assistance in cases of need, and promoting the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of society. When legal aid is effectively converged with welfare delivery mechanisms, it does not merely serve as a remedial process for individual grievances. Instead, it becomes a transformative force, ensuring that constitutional ideals such as substantive equality and inclusive governance are translated into reality for those who are often excluded from mainstream development narratives.

India’s statutory framework also reflects this constitutional vision. Article 39A, introduced through the 42<sup>nd</sup> Constitutional Amendment in 1976, specifically directs the state to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disabilities. This provision laid the foundation for the enactment of the Legal Services Authorities

---

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

Act, 1987, which established a three-tiered institutional structure comprising the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA), State Legal Services Authorities (SLSAs), and District Legal Services Authorities (DLSAs).<sup>3</sup>

These bodies are responsible for providing free legal services to eligible categories of persons, conducting legal awareness programmes, organising Lok Adalats for the amicable settlement of disputes, and promoting alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. While the legal infrastructure exists, its potential remains underutilised in regions such as Purvanchal, where access to legal awareness and administrative outreach is often minimal.

Over the years, NALSA has also introduced targeted schemes that aim to integrate legal services with broader developmental goals. Notable among these are NALSA (Effective Implementation of Poverty Alleviation Schemes) Scheme, 2015, & NALSA (Legal Services to the Workers in the Unorganised Sector) Scheme, 2015.<sup>4</sup> These schemes acknowledge that the beneficiaries of government welfare programmes often face structural and procedural barriers in accessing their rights. The objective is to ensure that legal services authorities not only assist individuals in legal disputes but also proactively facilitate access to welfare entitlements by acting as intermediaries between the state & citizens.

The judiciary has consistently upheld the right to legal aid as an essential component of access to justice. In *Hussainara Khatoon v. State of Bihar*,<sup>5</sup> the Supreme Court held that free legal services to the poor & needy are an essential element of any reasonable, fair, and just procedure under Article 21 of the Constitution. The Court noted that without legal aid, the right to a fair trial becomes illusory for the economically weaker sections. In *Khatri v. State of Bihar*,<sup>6</sup> the Court reiterated that legal aid must be provided not only during trial but also at the stage of arrest and remand, underlining the preventive and protective role of legal services.

Similarly, in *People's Union for Democratic Rights v. Union of India*,<sup>7</sup> the Court recognised the nexus between legal aid & enforcement of labour welfare laws, particularly those aimed at protecting workers from exploitative practices in the informal sector. In *State of H.P. v. Umed Ram Sharma*,<sup>8</sup> the Supreme Court expanded the interpretation of Article 21 to include the right to access roads and public infrastructure, thereby reinforcing the state's obligation to ensure equitable access to public services and amenities.

---

<sup>3</sup> Bhuvan Ribhu, *Access to Justice and the Indian Legal Services Authorities Act*, 8 N.U.J.S. L. REV. 1 (2015).

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> 1979 AIR 1369.

<sup>6</sup> 1981 AIR 928.

<sup>7</sup> 1982 AIR 1473.

<sup>8</sup> 1986 AIR 847.

These judicial pronouncements highlight that legal aid is not confined to litigation; it encompasses a wide spectrum of interventions, including enabling access to welfare schemes, protecting labour rights, and ensuring access to public infrastructure. When viewed in the context of a region like Purvanchal, where social and economic vulnerabilities are deeply entrenched, legal aid assumes a broader developmental role. It becomes a mechanism through which the ideals of the Constitution are actualised for the most marginalised communities.

### **THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT OF PURVANCHAL AND ACCESS TO WELFARE SCHEMES**

Purvanchal, comprising districts such as Gorakhpur, Varanasi, Azamgarh, Deoria, Ballia, and Mau, among others, is marked by a stark contrast between its cultural richness and developmental deprivation. Despite its historical significance and political relevance, the region suffers from chronic underdevelopment, high population density, inadequate infrastructure, and systemic socio-economic exclusion. According to various government and independent development reports, the region consistently performs poorly on indicators such as literacy rates, healthcare availability, employment levels, per capita income, and access to sanitation and education. The situation is further aggravated by factors such as caste-based discrimination, landlessness among Dalits and backward communities, gender-based inequalities, and lack of awareness about legal and civic rights.

Although the Government of India & state of Uttar Pradesh have implemented multiple welfare schemes in the region, the actual reach and impact of these schemes remain limited. Flagship programmes such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), the National Food Security Act (NFSA), Ayushman Bharat for health insurance, & Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) for financial inclusion are operational in most districts of Purvanchal. Yet, anecdotal evidence and field surveys suggest that the beneficiaries often struggle with bureaucratic delays, corruption, non-availability of documentation, and lack of grievance redressal mechanisms.<sup>9</sup>

A critical factor in this gap between policy and implementation is the lack of legal literacy among the rural population. Many eligible individuals are unaware of their rights under welfare schemes or are unable to navigate the procedural formalities required to access them. For example, a landless labourer may not know how to apply for a job card under MGNREGA or appeal against non-payment of wages. Similarly, women from Dalit or Muslim communities may not be aware of their entitlements under maternal health or housing schemes. The digital divide and linguistic

---

<sup>9</sup> Arvind Narrain, *Enforcing Rights: Role of Legal Aid in Advancing Social Inclusion*, 3(1) INDIAN J. L. & SOC'Y 15 (2012).

barriers further complicate access, especially when government portals and grievance systems are predominantly in Hindi or English and not in local dialects.

Additionally, there is a noticeable absence of legal service outreach in the region. Although DLSAs have been set up in almost all districts of Purvanchal, they remain under-resourced and underutilised. Legal aid lawyers are often inaccessible or ill-equipped to handle welfare-related grievances. There is minimal coordination between legal services authorities and local administrative departments such as the panchayats, block development offices, and social welfare departments. As a result, even where violations of welfare rights occur, such as denial of pensions, wrongful exclusions from ration lists, or forced evictions, there is no systemic legal intervention.

The socio-economic context of Purvanchal, therefore, presents both a challenge and an opportunity. On one hand, the structural inequalities, low literacy levels, and administrative barriers hinder effective access to welfare. On the other hand, the presence of a formal legal aid structure provides an institutional foundation upon which a convergence model can be built. If legal aid institutions are empowered to proactively engage with welfare implementation, by monitoring entitlements, assisting in application processes, educating communities about their rights, and addressing grievances, then the region could witness a significant shift in justice delivery and social inclusion.<sup>10</sup>

In the context of rural development, convergence is not merely a matter of administrative efficiency. It is about recognising the interconnectedness of legal and social entitlements. For a widow in rural Ballia, access to legal aid to claim a pension is as vital as court representation. For a disabled person in Mau, legal assistance in acquiring a disability certificate is as important as contesting discrimination. These examples illustrate that the future of social justice in Purvanchal lies not in isolated welfare or legal initiatives but in their meaningful integration.

## **BARRIERS TO CONVERGENCE BETWEEN LEGAL AID AND WELFARE SCHEMES IN PURVANCHAL**

Despite the theoretical compatibility and practical urgency of integrating legal aid with welfare delivery, the reality in Purvanchal remains fragmented and largely uncoordinated. Several interlinked barriers, both systemic and structural, undermine this potential convergence. These obstacles manifest at multiple levels, from institutional weaknesses to social stigma, from bureaucratic inertia to lack of legal infrastructure.

One of the most critical impediments is the institutional disconnect between legal aid authorities and welfare departments. The Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, assigns legal services bodies a largely autonomous function, whereas welfare departments, ranging from rural development to

---

<sup>10</sup> Arvind Narrain, *Enforcing Rights: Role of Legal Aid in Advancing Social Inclusion*, 3(1) INDIAN J. L. & SOC'Y 15 (2012).

health, labour, and minority welfare, operate under different verticals with their own administrative hierarchies. In the absence of formal channels of communication or shared accountability mechanisms, collaboration is often ad hoc or non-existent. For example, DLSAs are rarely included in district-level planning or monitoring meetings of welfare schemes. As a result, even when legal aid lawyers or para-legal volunteers become aware of violations or exclusions, they lack the institutional leverage to intervene meaningfully.<sup>11</sup>

Another major challenge is the lack of capacity and resources within the legal aid infrastructure. In many districts of Purvanchal, DLSAs operate with minimal staffing, low budgets, and poor outreach mechanisms. Legal literacy campaigns are infrequent and poorly designed, often reduced to symbolic events on Legal Services Day or Gandhi Jayanti. Para-legal volunteers, who could otherwise act as important links between communities and legal institutions, are undertrained, underpaid, and often deployed in urban areas rather than the rural interiors where they are most needed. Legal aid lawyers, too, frequently lack specialised knowledge about welfare entitlements, administrative law, or grievance redressal mechanisms under schemes like MNREGA or PMAY.<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, lack of awareness and legal consciousness among the public remains a significant roadblock. In rural Purvanchal, legal aid is still perceived as a service available only in criminal or family matters. People are often unaware that legal assistance can be sought to claim pensions, challenge wrongful exclusion from ration cards, or secure access to health benefits. There is also a deep-seated mistrust of legal institutions, stemming from experiences of corruption, caste-based discrimination, and procedural delays. This disconnect is exacerbated by the fact that welfare officers themselves are rarely sensitised to the role of legal aid bodies and may view legal intervention as interference rather than facilitation.

Another layer of complexity arises from socio-cultural factors, particularly caste, gender, and linguistic barriers. Scheduled Castes, Muslims, and OBCs, who constitute a significant portion of Purvanchal's population, often face implicit discrimination in accessing both legal and welfare services. Women, in particular, suffer a double disadvantage. Due to patriarchal norms, mobility restrictions, and economic dependency, many women are unable to even approach legal aid centres or government offices. Moreover, most documentation and grievance mechanisms are accessible only in Hindi or English, leaving out large numbers of people who are more comfortable in Bhojpuri or other regional dialects.

Finally, technological and administrative barriers pose new challenges in the digital era. Many welfare schemes now rely on online portals for application, verification, and grievance redressal. However, digital illiteracy and poor internet connectivity in large parts of rural Purvanchal make it nearly impossible for beneficiaries to access these services independently. Legal aid services

---

<sup>11</sup> S.P. Sathe, *Judicial Activism: The Indian Experience*, 6(1) WASH. U. J.L. & POL'Y 29 (2001).

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

have also not adapted adequately to the digital shift. Helplines, virtual legal aid clinics, or mobile legal aid vans are either absent or non-functional, particularly in districts like Kushinagar, Ghazipur, or Siddharthnagar.

Together, these barriers form a complex web that prevents meaningful convergence between legal aid and welfare schemes in Purvanchal. Addressing them requires not only administrative reform but also a reimagining of legal aid as a rights-based, participatory, and community-embedded function. The next part of this paper explores possible models and strategies to overcome these challenges and enhance convergence in practice.

## **CONCLUSION**

The vision of social justice, as embedded in the Indian Constitution, demands more than passive adherence to the rule of law; it requires an active reshaping of institutions and services to meet the needs of the most vulnerable. In Purvanchal, the disconnect between legal aid mechanisms and government welfare schemes has contributed to a cycle of exclusion, where entitlements often remain out of reach due to procedural, infrastructural, and informational barriers.

This paper has demonstrated that a meaningful convergence between legal aid and welfare services is not only feasible but essential for advancing justice in the region. Legal aid must move beyond the courtroom and enter the fields, villages, and homes where rights are routinely denied in silence. Welfare schemes, while well-intentioned, must be backed by legal empowerment to prevent their capture by corruption, casteism, or apathy. Together, they can create a web of accountability, visibility, and inclusion.

Convergence must be rooted in a rights-based approach, with communities at its centre and institutions as its facilitators. It must challenge not only bureaucratic inefficiency but also social hierarchies and digital divides. If implemented with seriousness and sensitivity, the integration of legal aid with welfare delivery in Purvanchal can serve as a model for other underdeveloped regions in India and stand as a testament to the idea that justice must not only be accessible, it must be proactive, participatory, and empowering.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

To actualise the convergence of legal aid with welfare schemes in Purvanchal and thereby enhance social justice, a multi-dimensional strategy must be adopted. The recommendations offered below are both structural and community-oriented, aiming to address the gaps identified in previous sections.

First, a formal institutional convergence mechanism should be developed at the district and block levels. This can take the form of periodic joint coordination meetings between DLSAs & departments responsible for implementing welfare schemes such as rural development, social

welfare, health, and minority affairs. These meetings must be made mandatory by administrative order to promote synergy, case-sharing, and tracking of entitlements.

Second, capacity-building of legal aid professionals must be prioritised. Legal aid lawyers, panel advocates, and para-legal volunteers should receive targeted training on procedural and substantive aspects of major welfare schemes like MGNREGA, NFSA, PMAY, and Ayushman Bharat. The integration of welfare rights into legal aid manuals, refresher courses, and induction modules would improve the responsiveness and competence of legal professionals in handling rights-based claims.

Third, the deployment of community-level para-legal volunteers (PLVs) should be restructured. PLVs must be placed strategically in rural and marginalised habitations and drawn from within the communities they serve. Involving women, Dalits, and minorities as PLVs would ensure greater trust and access. Their roles should be expanded to include assistance in filling out forms, following up on grievances, and linking beneficiaries to legal remedies.

Fourth, mobile legal aid vans and legal literacy camps should be institutionalised and regularised. These mobile units can work in tandem with health camps, ration distribution centres, and job card registration drives, thereby reaching citizens where they are. Legal literacy should focus not merely on court rights but on everyday entitlements under welfare schemes, tailored to local dialects and using culturally sensitive materials.

Fifth, digital integration of legal aid with welfare portals must be encouraged. DLSAs should be granted access to monitor and assist with e-governance platforms of welfare schemes, such as those of the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) or Ayushman Bharat. Further, a shared digital grievance redressal platform between legal aid and administrative departments should be piloted to track welfare violations and resolutions.

Sixth, incentivising public interest litigation (PILs) and class action lawsuits from within legal aid institutions can push systemic change. When DLSAs identify patterns of exclusion or widespread corruption in the delivery of welfare schemes, they should be empowered to initiate litigation or policy representations, with appropriate safeguards to prevent political misuse.

Finally, the State Legal Services Authority (SLSA) of Uttar Pradesh and NALSA should consider launching a “Purvanchal Convergence Project,” a region-specific pilot programme aimed at integrating legal aid into governance frameworks in eastern Uttar Pradesh. This can act as a model for replication across similarly underdeveloped regions in India.