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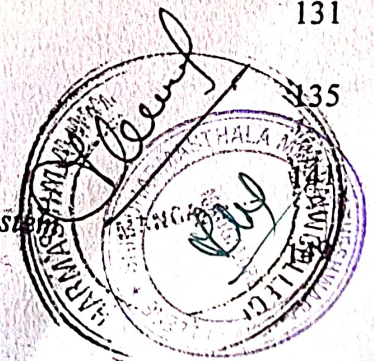


LEGAL OPUS

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ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE

Mr. Santhosh Kumar *

Legal systems regulate or control the social behavior in accordance with the statute and rules. The words 'access to justice' are not easily defined but they focus on two basic purposes of the legal system; the system by which people may vindicate their rights or resolve their disputes under the general auspices of the state. First, the system must be equally accessible to all; second, it must lead to results that are individually and socially just.

Courts pronounce judgments on thousands and thousands of cases every year. New rulings are made in a few decisions, while, old rulings are repeated in numerous decisions. The multiplicity of decisions makes very difficult position of judicial officers to get the appropriate and most suitable decision on his subject matter. A judicial officer or a judge seeking to find law and law related information must be familiar with what a law library contains and where the material such as statute, law reports, books, journals, dictionaries and encyclopedias are placed. For anyone intending to prepare some kind of writing on law or any law related problem or question, the law library serves as a laboratory.

Law library is a vital factor in the administration of justice, an institution of extraordinary significance in a free society. Law library is not merely collection of books. It is a collection of legal literature properly housed and organized to serve the intended user community with dissemination of information. The law library may be described as the 'Lawyers workshop'.

Indian courts functioning at different level are burdened with pendency of cases due to various reasons. Since the library systems attached to any level of the court, i.e. Supreme Court, High Court or the district Courts, are integral part of the court and contributing in its own way for the administration of justice. To conduct the proceedings of the court with regard to the cases/litigations before a court, the court officer or a judge must be a knowledgeable person in many respects, i.e. law, general knowledge, common sense, case laws, new enactments, philosophy, psychology, human rights etc. The court library is the only place a judicial officer can rely upon to access all these required information sources. The study of the court libraries to check to what extent it is itself reliant to provide all the necessary feedback to the judicial officers to conduct the court proceedings efficiently and successfully with the changing needs and situation.

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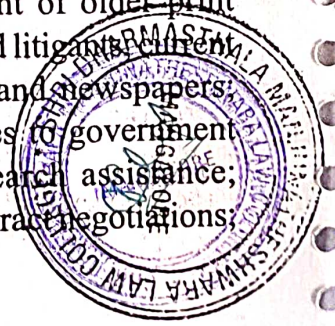
Court libraries are statutory entities supporting either the trial court system, High Court or Supreme Court. These law libraries share a common mission of making legal information available to the judicial officers and their support staff of their respective jurisdiction.

The judicial library system consists of libraries established by the court to serve the judges and officers of the court and bar associations' libraries for the practitioners in the court. Court libraries are funded by the state Govt.

The district court library attached to the respective district courts have the jurisdiction of serving all the information needs of judicial officers belongs to different courts like Family Courts, Labour courts, Civil courts, Munsif Courts, Sessions Courts etc at the District level. Generally, collection of district court library pre-dominantly covers law reports, law journals, literatures of law, law books, statutes, ordinances, law digests, case laws, etc. Since it serves with specialized collection of resources and specific group of users, it is a kind of special libraries. A court library resembles other law libraries in terms of its resources and collections.

Law librarians and law libraries have a duty to promote access to justice in the various law libraries in which they work, be they academic, law firm, State, Court or R & D Libraries. They have the knowledge, skills, and resources to provide self-represented litigants with needed information and assistance and provide referrals to legal resources in the community. It is also important to maintain impartiality and neutrality. Access to justice includes affordable legal services; readily available legal information and forms; the ability to bring a case to trial without hiring an attorney; the unbundling of legal services; fair treatment and equality in the justice system regardless of social standing; and confidence that the outcome will be fair and just. By providing all these, law libraries provide the legal information necessary for the effective functioning of the justice system. The use of the Internet for obtaining legal information has increased dramatically. This trend, however, can lead to the misconception that most legal information is freely available via common search engines. While many states have their current statutes and some appellate decisions on official Web sites, a vast amount of legal information is only available in print, microform or within commercial databases. In addition, court law libraries continue to be the best resource for older case law, legal periodicals, and texts, as well as annotated statutes and continuing legal education seminar materials.

Through research assistance, training and other services, court libraries play a vital role in making these collections and databases accessible to all user groups. services to judicial officers; training in the use of subscription databases, research assistance; management of web page content; preservation and management of older print materials and those not available online; assistance to self-represented litigants; current awareness of new developments, including routing of journals and newspapers; contract negotiations with subscription database vendors; services to government advocates; Training in the use of subscription databases; Research assistance; compilation of legislative histories; current awareness services; contract negotiations;



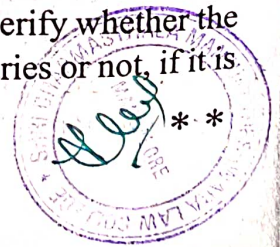
services to private attorneys; public access to subscription databases; training in the use of subscription databases; circulation of texts and treatises; remote access to online catalogs and periodicals.

Law librarians are information managers, resource evaluators, access facilitators, expert researchers, teachers and trainers. They possess the knowledge and finely tuned skills necessary to efficiently procure legal information in a changing environment, saving organizations countless research hours. Law librarians add value to the as they; Identify, select and acquire the best information sources as economically as possible; Offer professional advice on how to effectively obtain and use information and technology; Stay abreast of cutting-edge information resources and technology and share that knowledge with others; Eliminate repetition in research and development by distributing information throughout the organization As information managers, law librarians: make information resources accessible and user-friendly for both print and electronic applications; organize internal records and data for easy access and preservation; sort through data in order to provide timely and relevant information to researchers; Gather and structure information for speakers, presenters and others in the public eye As expert researchers, law librarians; Conduct research and retrieve information quickly; Gather data about both research and user, data about new products and services; Collect, maintain and deliver information necessary to achieve a competitive edge; Guide researchers with search strategies and information sources, saving time and reducing frustration; Investigate, recommend and manage new technologies to enhance productivity, as teachers and trainers, law librarians; Educate others about how to choose and use information resources and technology for maximum benefits; Teach others to conduct online and print research effectively; Train and develop efficient researchers, saving time and money

There is a significant role of court library services in the administration of justice at District Courts. Importance of library services has been under valued and the library system has not been developed along with the development of judicial system. There is a need of reorganization of the library and information services at District court libraries. The legal and judicial information system has still not become an important input in the administration of justice in India.

The efforts made by the government to initiate the e-courts have not been fully materialized and conditions of district court libraries is continuing almost with the situation prevailing in the past several years.

Every system tend to change according to the changes of the parent institution. Legal system comprising the court of law at different level like district, state and Central are changing over a period of time in respect of jurisdiction, clientele, nature of functioning, level of authorities etc. Here the need arises to conduct the study of libraries and information systems attached to these institutions to verify whether the changes brought in by the whole system is incorporated to the libraries or not, if it is incorporated, does it successfully serve the purpose.



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