

FULL TEXT OF THE SPEECH DELIVERED BY
HON'BLE CHIEF JUSTICE OF INDIA SHRI JUSTICE N V RAMANA
AT THE INAUGURATION OF NEW BUILDING OF
ODISHA STATE LEGAL SERVICES AUTHORITY IN CUTTACK.
25 SEPTEMBER 2021

1. Today, I am overwhelmed to be here in this ancient land whose history dates back to more than 2000 years. The land whose culture and heritage influenced civilisations beyond the vast bay of Bengal. The land where religions amalgamated into the way of life. The land of archaeological treasures, of majestic art and craft, of nature's bounty. As the famous poet, Utkala Vyasa Kabi- Fakir Mohan Senapati once said:

*“Utkala Pabitra Bhumi Bharata Madhyan re,
Karanti ethire basaa punya baanta naare,
Asankhya asankhya jaati asuchanti dhayeen,
Ehi Maha punya kehtra dekhi bara paayeen.”*

*(Odisha is a holy land, many holy people have led their lives here,
and people from all over are here to be a part of this sacred land.)*

I belong to the neighbouring state. We not only share rivers and Bay of Bengal, we also share the culture, food habits etc. We even shared the history. Although I have visited the state on several occasions, today I am glad for being given an opportunity to interact with the people of Odisha.

2. The State of Odisha is known for its rich legal history. I was told that, the Cuttack Bar Association is one of the oldest bar associations in the country dating back to 1859. Many of its luminaries like Utkala Gourav Madhusudan Das, Utkala Mani Gopabandhu Das, Sri Janakinath Bose, Utkala Ratna Biswanath Mishra played significant role in India's freedom struggle.
3. I am extremely happy to be here to inaugurate the building of the State Legal Services Authority. The cause and activities of legal services are very close to my heart. I need not reiterate the provisions of the constitution, however, I must reiterate that guarantee of equal justice formed the core- beliefs of the framers of our constitution. Our constitutional aspirations shall never be achieved until the most vulnerable sections can enforce their rights.
4. But the challenge of accessing justice gets magnified in States which pose significant hurdles like regional and economic disparity. Particularly, in the state of Odisha, as per the last census, around 83.3% of people are living in the rural areas, and are often excluded from the

formal justice delivery system, the role of legal service institution assumes great importance.

5. The Indian Judicial system is faced with twin challenges. First, is that of “Indianisation of Justice delivery system” which I mentioned in an earlier speech. I take this opportunity to further elaborate on this.
6. Even after 74 years of independence, traditional and agrarian societies which have been following customary ways of life, still feel hesitant to approach the courts. The practices, procedures, language and everything of our Courts feels alien to them. Between the complex language of the acts and the process of justice delivery, the common man seems to lose control over the fate of his grievance. Often in this trajectory, the justice-seeker feels like an outsider to the system.
7. Although a harsh reality, often our legal system fails to take into consideration the social realities and implications. Sadly, our system is designed in such a way that by the time all the facts and law are churned in the court of law, much gets lost in the process. People might be bringing their problems to the courts, but what remains at the end of a day is yet another “case”.
8. These are the issues that I want to be addressed through Indianisation. The general belief is that it is the courts which are capable of addressing these concerns. But the stark reality is that unless the legal framework is drastically altered to make the justice delivery mechanism people friendly, we will not be able to achieve this goal.
9. It is general understanding of the people that it is the court’s responsibility to make laws. This notion has to be dispelled. This is where the role of other organs of the state, i.e. the Legislature and the Executive assumes great significance.
10. The Legislature needs to revisit the laws and reform them to suit the needs of time and people. I emphasize, our laws must match with our practical realities. The executive has to match these efforts by way of simplifying the corresponding rules. Most importantly, the Executive and the Legislature should function in unison in realising the Constitutional aspirations.
11. It is only then, that the Judiciary would not be compelled to step in as a law-maker and would only be left with the duty of applying and interpreting the same. At the end of the day, it is the harmonious functioning of the three Organs of the State that can remove the procedural barriers to justice.
12. The second challenge is enabling the people to “decode the justice delivery system by raising awareness”
13. The concept of ‘Access to Justice’ in India is much broader than simply providing lawyers for representation before the courts. In India, the task to facilitate access to justice to the poor and marginalized has been conferred upon the Legal Services Institutions. Their activities include increasing legal awareness and legal literacy amongst such classes who have traditionally remained outside the purview of our system.

- 14.** The legal services authorities are dedicated to integrating and empowering the most vulnerable classes by providing them legal aid for the realization of their rights and entitlements. The legal services network reaches the persons residing in remote and far-flung areas to ensure inclusion of such persons into the justice delivery system.
- 15.** We understand people need amelioration of their issues and grievances. Be it a matter of compensation or eviction or a customary issue of marriage and inheritance, a common man needs a faster remedy.
- 16.** The legal services authorities have a great responsibility upon themselves to boost the ADR mechanisms such as Lok Adalat, mediations, and conciliations, so as to render justice, which is more inclusive, participatory, and definitely faster.
- 17.** Therefore, the legal services have become an integral part of the judicial administration. Lack of proper infrastructure and funds result in reduction of the activities carried out by these institutions. As a result, the number of beneficiaries who avail services of these institutions reduces. Ultimately the goal of access to justice for all gets hampered.
- 18.** If we want to retain the faith of our people, we need to strengthen not only the judicial infrastructure, but we also need to boost our outreach programs as well. Considering the gravity of the challenge, we have decided to launch a country-wide robust legal awareness mission in the upcoming week. I expect your cooperation and support to take this effort into the remotest corner.
- 19.** I was very surprised that, in spite of a long standing history, the State legal services in Odisha did not have a building of their own yet. However, I am glad to know that, in spite of constraints, the Odisha State Legal Services have been working dedicatedly for increasing access to justice. I have been informed that, around 1062 panel lawyers are empanelled with the Legal Services Authorities in Odisha, to provide necessary legal services. Approximately 3000 paralegal volunteers are tirelessly working throughout the pandemic to further the goals of justice. I have also been informed that, in the past year, the state authorities along with the district legal services authorities have organised over 420 legal awareness and literacy programs and have been providing services in over 492 legal services clinics. Approximately, Rs. 28 crores have been disbursed to the beneficiaries of the victim compensation scheme through the legal services clinics. Around 36,500 cases have settled through National and State Lok Adalats. These numbers are certainly encouraging. With the addition of this new building, spread over 77,708 sq. feet with expenditure of Rs. 9,14,00,000, the legal aid movement in Odisha will gain new momentum.
- 20.** I am fortunate to have Justice Lalit as the executive Chairman of NALSA. He has put NALSA in power-drive mode, he has been conducting various programs actively. He believes in hands-on monitoring, he physically

attends all the events, he personally visits jail. All of this shows his concern to the cause of justice.

21. I am told that people of this State fondly remember my Brother Justice Vineet Saran as their Chief. He was actively involved in the legal services movement in Odisha. It was during his tenure that steps were initiated regarding this building project.
22. I would like to congratulate the Chief Justice of Odisha High Court, Justice S. Muralidhar, Patron-in-Chief of SLSA. The people of Odisha are very fortunate to have such an active and welfare-oriented judge as their Chief Justice. Justice Muralidhar has always championed the cause of the marginalised and under-privileged.
23. I also congratulate Justice Sanjay Kumar Mishra, Executive Chairman SLSA, and Justice C.R. Dash, Chairman, SLSA, for their tireless dedication. I wish you and all the other associate judges of the High Court, great success and hope they reach greater heights.
24. I would also like to thank the State Government for their active co-operation and support.
25. I take this opportunity to appreciate the efforts put in by various stakeholders: the legal services authorities, the panel lawyers and the paralegal volunteers for showing immense flexibility and determination for the cause of justice even during such difficult times. Every intervention is a clear indication of the important position you hold in our justice delivery system.
26. The power and strength of any justice-delivery system is derived from the faith of the people in it. The Bar and Bench need to work in conjunction to affirm the faith that a citizen has in the justice delivery system. We are mere custodians. I am sure that you will be able to make use of this grand edifice, for the service of the people. In the spirit of selfless service, I would like to recite a few words by Utkala Mani Gopa Bandhu Das:

*“Manaba Jibana nuhen kebala barsa masa deena
danda,
Karme jeeyen naara,
karma eka taara,
jiba nara maana danda.”*

(Life of a man is not counted in terms of the time that he spent on earth. But the number of good deeds he undertook in his lifetime. Karma is the only law of life.)

Namaskar.