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### **ABSTRACT:**

*“This research paper focuses on the initiatives implemented by the E-Committee of the Supreme Court of India to improve access to justice through technology. It highlights the importance of access to justice and the barriers faced by individuals in obtaining legal remedies. The paper discusses the transformative role of technology in the justice system and examines specific initiatives introduced by the E-Committee. A prominent initiative highlighted is the **National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG)**, which centralizes case-related information from district courts to enhance transparency, efficiency, and accessibility. The establishment of e-Courts, facilitating electronic case filing, online management, and virtual hearings, is also discussed, including the benefits and challenges associated with this system. The research paper delves into the use of technology to enhance legal aid services, focusing on the Tele-Law program that provides video-conferencing-based legal advice to marginalized communities. Furthermore, it delves with Case Information System (CIS) which aims to modernize and digitize the country's judicial system. The paper addresses challenges and criticisms of these initiatives, including concerns related to the digital divide and data privacy. It concludes by discussing future developments and the potential for leveraging technology to further improve access to justice for all”.*

**Keywords: E-Committee, Access to justice, Digital initiatives, E-Courts, Virtual courts, Online Case management, Technological literacy, Privacy concerns, Digitalization.**

### **1. INTRODUCTION:**

The Indian Judiciary recognizes the urgent need for procedural re-engineering, effective use of human resources, and change management through Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to enhance the accessibility, efficiency, transparency, and accountability of the justice delivery system. Despite the country's technological proficiency, the full potential of ICT in public service sectors like the judiciary has not been fully explored. In 2004, the Chief Justice of India proposed the formation of an E-Committee to develop a national policy



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on computerization and provide guidance on managerial and technological changes. The Union Cabinet approved the proposal, leading to the establishment of the E-Committee under the leadership of Dr Justice G.C. Bharuka. The committee was tasked with creating an action plan for the phased implementation of ICT in the justice system. The E-Committee presented its strategic plan to the Chief Justice in 2005, which was then distributed to the Chief Justices of all High Courts and various stakeholders. Extensive consultations were conducted to assess the current technology landscape, including court-related procedures, cost, security, scalability, and support systems. Based on these inputs, the E-Committee formulated a national policy and action plan for the implementation of ICT in the Indian Judiciary within a five-year timeframe. This plan aims to leverage technology to improve the quality and quantity of judicial productivity, making justice more accessible, cost-effective, and efficient. The report of the E-Committee has been disseminated to key stakeholders, including jurists, academics, government ministries, and state law ministers, facilitating discussions and modifications as required. This comprehensive effort towards ICT enablement in the judiciary is crucial for bringing about significant positive changes in the justice delivery system, ultimately benefiting the citizens of India.

## **2. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES:**

A review of the computerization projects undertaken in the Indian courts during the last fifteen years mostly at the High Court levels and in 1997 at District Court level reveal that unless the court functionaries like the Judges and the Court staff show a personal initiative and involvement for bringing about a change in its work culture by use of technology, the efforts can hardly succeed at the touchstone of speed and quality. Till recently, the scope and purpose of using computers/ICT was not very clearly perceived or appreciated by the policy makers in the judiciary. By and large, the internal users felt satisfied with the automation of causelist preparation, digital transcription of orders and judgments and of late, their publication on the Internet.<sup>1</sup> These exercises though had the effect of enhancing the court services to a certain

<sup>1</sup> The Supreme Court of India's Vision for e-Courts: The Need to Retain Justice as a Public Service, <https://www.thehinducentre.com/the-arena/the-supreme-court-of-indias-vision-for-ecourts-the-need-to-retain-justice-as-a-public-service-html-version/article64931616.ece> (last visited June 7, 2023).

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degrees but in the real sense, had 6 hardly in any way advanced the cause of achieving the basis objectives of providing speedy, qualitative and cost-effective justice, reducing harassments and corruption or enhancing transparency and accountability. The plan prepared by the E-Committee seeks to achieve the objectives by meaningful effective use of ICT through its implementation in a phased manner over a period of five years. It may be noticed here that no doubt hardware deployment in the courts can be made within two to three years and some of the processes can be automated but in order to avail the best of the technology to answer the basic needs and avowed objectives, there has to be a sustainable change in attitude, work culture and transformation of processes, which is time consuming and requires continuous over-viewing, training and fine-tuning to make the change management happen, till it becomes an irreversible part of the organizational behaviour.<sup>2</sup>

### **3. E-COMMITTEE OF SUPREME COURT:**

The e-committee of the Supreme Court of India is a dedicated body responsible for overseeing the implementation of the e-Courts Project, which aims to digitize and streamline the judicial system in the country. The committee comprises judges, legal experts, and technical professionals who work together to develop and implement various initiatives to enhance access to justice and improve the efficiency of court proceedings. One of the key objectives of the e-committee is to develop and implement technological solutions to facilitate the digital transformation of courts across the country. The committee has introduced several initiatives to achieve this goal. These include the establishment of a *Case Information System (CIS)* and the *National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG)*, the development of mobile applications, and the provision of capacity building programs. The **Case Information System (CIS)** is a centralized database that enables the electronic management of case-related information. It allows judges, lawyers, and litigants to access case records, file petitions, and track the progress of their cases online. CIS has been implemented in various courts across the country, enabling seamless information exchange and improving the efficiency of case management. The *National*

<sup>2</sup> Raja, Kartikey, *Online Disputes Resolution (ODR): The Future of Justice in India*, 7 INT'LJLMH 2167, 2171 (2020).

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*Judicial Data Grid (NJDG)* is another significant initiative by the e-committee. It is a comprehensive database that consolidates case-related information from different courts and provides real-time updates on case status, case history, and other relevant details. The NJDG serves as a valuable resource for judges, lawyers, and litigants to access accurate and up-to-date information about ongoing cases. To enhance convenience and accessibility, the e-committee has developed mobile applications such as *e-Courts Services and National Service and Tracking of Electronic Processes (NSTEP)*. These applications provide users with access to case-related information, cause lists, and status updates on their mobile devices. By leveraging mobile technology, these applications enable litigants and lawyers to easily access legal information, track case progress, and stay updated on court proceedings.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to technological advancements, the e-committee recognizes the importance of capacity building to ensure the effective utilization of technology in legal proceedings. The committee organizes training programs and workshops for judges, court staff, and lawyers to enhance their skills in using technology platforms. These programs familiarize participants with the various digital tools and platforms implemented under the e-Courts Project and provide them with hands-on training to effectively utilize these technologies in different aspects of the judicial process. The e-committee also focuses on improving infrastructure and connectivity in courts across the country. It promotes the establishment of computerized courtrooms equipped with modern technology, including video conferencing facilities, to facilitate remote hearings and reduce the need for physical presence in courtrooms. This initiative enables greater access to justice, particularly for those in remote areas or with limited mobility. Furthermore, the e-committee actively engages with various stakeholders, including judges, lawyers, and government agencies, to gather feedback and address challenges in the implementation of technology-driven solutions. It works in collaboration with technical experts and IT professionals to continuously enhance the functionality and usability of digital platforms, ensuring that they meet the evolving needs of the judicial system. Overall, the e-

<sup>3</sup> Rehn, Nathan, et al. *Justice without delay: recommendations for legal and institutional reforms in the Indian Courts*, 4 JGLRP 67, 71-72 (2011).



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committee of the Supreme Court of India plays a pivotal role in driving the digital transformation of the judicial system. Through the implementation of technological initiatives, development of mobile applications, provision of capacity building programs, and focus on infrastructure improvement, the committee aims to enhance access to justice, streamline court proceedings, and promote transparency and efficiency in the Indian legal system.<sup>4</sup>

#### **4. INITIATIVES BY SUPREME COURT:**

The e-committee of the Supreme Court of India has undertaken several initiatives to facilitate access to justice through the use of technology. ***These initiatives aim to leverage digital platforms and tools to make the legal process more efficient, transparent, and accessible to all. Some of the key initiatives include:***

##### **4.1 NATIONAL JUDICIAL DATA GRID (NJDG):**

The e-committee of the Supreme Court of India has introduced the *National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG)* as a ground-breaking initiative to enhance transparency and accessibility in the Indian judicial system. The NJDG is an online platform that provides comprehensive information on pending and disposed of cases from district courts, high courts, and the Supreme Court. Its main objective is to streamline case management, reduce delays, and promote accountability. The NJDG has revolutionized the handling and accessibility of judicial data by serving as a centralized repository of case information. It enables litigants, lawyers, judges, and the general public to access real-time updates on case progress. This transparency reduces the opaqueness of the judicial process and fosters public trust. One of the key features of the NJDG is its user-friendly interface, allowing for easy navigation and search of case-related information. Users can search for cases using various parameters such as case number, party name, advocate name, or judge name. This feature facilitates efficient case tracking and keeps stakeholders informed about case status. The NJDG also generates statistical reports and data analytics, providing insights into case pendency, disposal rates, and other key performance indicators. These reports assist in identifying

<sup>4</sup> Anand, Anku., *Virtual Courts: The Changing Face of Indian Judicial System*, 14 SSRN 3865629, 121, 129 (2021).

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bottlenecks in the judicial system and developing effective case management strategies. Additionally, the NJDG integrates with e-Courts Services, enabling online case filing and electronic issuance of notices and summons. This integration eliminates the need for physical paperwork, saves time and resources, and reduces the risk of document loss or manipulation. Moreover, the NJDG encourages the use of video conferencing for remote hearings, benefiting individuals in remote areas who face logistical challenges in attending court proceedings. Video conferencing facilities make the judicial process more accessible and convenient, allowing litigants to present their cases without physical presence. The NJDG has significantly improved case management and reduced delays in the judicial system. Real-time data on case pendency and disposal rates helps judges prioritize cases and expedite justice delivery, thus addressing the backlog of cases. Furthermore, the NJDG promotes transparency and accountability by enabling public access to information about pending cases, court orders, and judgments. This enhances scrutiny and public participation in the judicial process, acting as a safeguard against misuse of power or undue delays. The NJDG has been adopted by all states and union territories in India, ensuring consistency and facilitating the comparison of judicial performance across different jurisdictions. While challenges exist, such as the regular updating of case data, efforts should be made to maintain accurate and timely data entry to preserve the integrity and reliability of the NJDG.<sup>5</sup> *The National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG)* is a transformative initiative that has revolutionized the management and accessibility of judicial data in India. It promotes transparency, accountability, and efficiency in the judicial system. Through real-time updates, statistical reports, and online services, the NJDG has improved access to justice and reduced delays. It serves as a valuable tool for judges, lawyers, litigants, and the general public, empowering them with information and enhancing the effectiveness of the judicial system.<sup>6</sup>

## **4.2 E-COURTS PROJECT:**

<sup>5</sup> Salkute, Sanjay Rambhau. "The role of judicial officer in the court management & E-court maintenance", 4 INT'LJARMSS 50, 52-59 (2014).

<sup>6</sup> Papiya Golder, *Future of Virtual Courts in India Post Pandemic: An Analysis*, 7 IJRAR 982, 984 (2020).

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The e-Courts Project in India is a government initiative aimed at modernizing the judicial system through digitalization. Launched in 2005, the project focuses on leveraging technology to improve access to justice, streamline case management, and enhance court processes. It aims to transition from paper-based procedures to a digital ecosystem, making the judiciary more accessible and transparent. Key components of the e-Courts Project include the National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG), a centralized online platform that provides real-time data on pending and disposed of cases. The NJDG enhances transparency by offering information on case status, orders, and judgments to litigants, lawyers, judges, and the public. Another important aspect is the Case Information System (CIS), which facilitates the computerization of case records and improves storage, retrieval, and management of case-related information. The CIS reduces paperwork, minimizes errors, and enhances court efficiency.<sup>7</sup> The project also includes the implementation of a Wide Area Network (WAN), connecting courts nationwide and enabling seamless communication and data sharing. This network integration promotes collaboration and coordination between stakeholders. The e-Filing allows litigants to file cases electronically, saving time and improving convenience. Video conferencing technology facilitates remote hearings, benefiting individuals in remote areas or with physical challenges. Capacity building programs equip judicial officers and court staff with necessary skills for utilizing technology effectively. The e-Courts Project has achieved significant milestones, bringing positive changes to the judicial system. It has improved case management, reduced delays, enhanced transparency, and increased access to justice. However, challenges such as infrastructure limitations and the need for continuous monitoring and upgradation must be addressed for sustained success. The e-Courts Project in India aims to digitize and modernize the judicial system through technology adoption. By leveraging platforms like the NJDG and CIS, implementing e-Filing and video conferencing, and emphasizing capacity building, the project enhances efficiency, transparency, and accessibility in the Indian judiciary. Ongoing efforts to overcome challenges and maintain the technological infrastructure are crucial for the project's continued success.

<sup>7</sup> Verma, Kshitiz, "e-courts project: A giant leap by Indian judiciary", 6 JOAL 201, 203, (2018).

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### **4.3 CASE INFORMATION SYSTEM (CIS):**

The Case Information System (CIS) is a critical element of the e-Courts Project in India, which aims to modernize and digitize the country's judicial system. The CIS is a computerized system that manages and retrieves case-related information in a digital format, streamlining processes and enhancing transparency. The CIS serves as a centralized database, storing comprehensive details such as case numbers, parties involved, case status, and history. It eliminates the need for physical records, simplifying storage and retrieval. Court personnel can input case information into the system, making it easily searchable by case number, party name, or advocate name. This digitization improves efficiency, reduces paperwork, and saves time for court staff, lawyers, and litigants. The CIS enables tracking and monitoring of case progress, allowing judges and court administrators to manage schedules and stay informed about hearings. Real-time updates reduce delays and expedite justice delivery. It also generates statistical reports and data analytics, providing insights into case pendency and disposal rates, aiding in system improvement. Implementing the CIS has numerous benefits. It reduces reliance on physical paperwork, enhances accuracy, and facilitates secure information sharing. It also promotes transparency by allowing access to case information, court orders, and judgments, building trust and accountability. However, successful implementation requires adequate infrastructure, reliable connectivity, and data security measures. Training programs are essential to familiarize court personnel with the system. The Case Information System (CIS) is a vital part of India's e-Courts Project. It streamlines case management, improves efficiency, and enhances transparency, contributing to a more accessible and efficient justice system.<sup>8</sup>

### **4.4 MOBILE APPLICATIONS:**

The e-Committee of the Supreme Court of India has implemented impactful initiatives to enhance access to justice through the creation of mobile applications. Among these initiatives are the e-Courts Services and National Service and Tracking of Electronic Processes (NSTEP) mobile applications, developed as part of the e-Courts Project. These

<sup>8</sup> Bhardwaj, Raj Kumar, "The Indian judicial system: Transition from print to digital", 13 JLIM 201, 203-206 (2013).



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applications aim to provide convenient access to case-related information and facilitate effective communication between litigants, lawyers, and the judicial system. The e-Courts Services mobile application offers a range of services for litigants and lawyers. It allows users to access case information, including status, orders, and history. Litigants can search for their cases using various criteria such as case number, party name, advocate name, or FIR number. The application also enables tracking of case progress and real-time updates on hearings, ensuring litigants remain informed about their cases. Additionally, the e-Courts Services application provides a cause list feature that displays scheduled hearings for various courts, enabling lawyers and litigants to plan their visits accordingly. The application grants access to court orders and judgments, providing users with convenient access to legal decisions. Another notable application developed by the e-Committee is the National Service and Tracking of Electronic Processes (NSTEP). This application streamlines the process of serving and tracking electronic processes, such as summons and notices. It facilitates electronic service through email and SMS notifications, allowing users to track the delivery status of these processes. The NSTEP application also offers features for efficient management of electronic processes, including the generation and downloading of digitally signed processes and maintaining records of served processes. This digital approach reduces reliance on physical paperwork, enhances efficiency, and ensures secure delivery of legal documents. Both the e-Courts Services and NSTEP mobile applications significantly improve access to justice by leveraging mobile technology. They provide a user-friendly interface accessible on smartphones, enabling litigants and lawyers to access case-related information and receive updates on the go. These applications promote transparency by allowing litigants to track case progress and stay informed about court proceedings. Moreover, they save time and effort by eliminating the need for physical visits to obtain case-related information. To ensure the reliability and effectiveness of these mobile applications, the e-Committee prioritizes robust data security measures. Encryption protocols and other security features are implemented to safeguard user data. Regular updates and enhancements address technical issues and enhance user experience. The development and deployment of these mobile applications exemplify the commitment of



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the e-Committee to leverage technology for enhancing access to justice in India. By empowering litigants and lawyers with easy access to case-related information and updates, these applications bridge the gap between the judiciary and users of the legal system, making the judicial process more transparent, efficient, and accessible.<sup>9</sup>

#### **4.5 CAPACITY BUILDING:**

The e-committee of the Supreme Court of India recognizes the significance of enhancing technological skills among legal professionals to effectively utilize digital tools in legal proceedings. As part of this effort, the committee organizes training programs and workshops to equip judges, court staff, and lawyers with the knowledge and expertise to leverage technology under the e-Courts Project. The capacity building initiatives cater to the specific needs of each group. For judges, specialized training covers case management software, electronic evidence management, and virtual court proceedings. They learn to navigate the case information system, access relevant case documents, and utilize digital tools for efficient case handling. Court staff, including clerks and administrative personnel, participate in programs focusing on digital platform handling, electronic case record management, and seamless information flow within the court system. Topics such as document scanning, data entry, and effective use of the case information system are covered. Lawyers, being crucial stakeholders, are provided workshops to understand digital case filing, document submission, and accessing case-related information. They are trained in presenting arguments effectively in virtual court proceedings and using video conferencing for remote hearings. Additionally, they are educated on data security, confidentiality, and ethical considerations in technology use for legal purposes. These capacity building initiatives serve as platforms for knowledge sharing and collaboration, promoting a culture of continuous learning and innovation in the legal community. The e-committee collaborates with reputed institutions to develop training modules and resource materials, accessible online and offline, to reach a wider audience. The establishment of dedicated training centers and e-learning platforms further supports ongoing capacity

<sup>9</sup> Rattan, Jyoti and Vijay Rattan, "Role of Information and Communication Technologies in the Metamorphosis of Justice Administration in India: A Legal Study", 69 IJPA 68, 72-86, (2023).

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building efforts. By investing in capacity building, the e-committee aims to create a skilled and tech-savvy legal workforce.<sup>10</sup> Improved digital literacy and proficiency enable the seamless integration of technology into legal proceedings, resulting in greater efficiency, transparency, and accessibility in the delivery of justice.

## **5. OTHER INITIATIVE BY THE E-COMMITTEE OF SUPREME COURT:**

### **5.1 ONLINE FILING:**

The e-Committee of the Supreme Court of India has played a vital role in revolutionizing the traditional paper-based filing process in courts by introducing online filing systems. This initiative has brought numerous benefits, greatly facilitating access to justice. With online filing systems, litigants and lawyers can electronically submit their petitions, documents, and applications through dedicated web portals or platforms, eliminating the need for physical filing and reducing paperwork and logistical challenges. This efficient approach saves time and resources, especially for parties located in different cities or countries, as they no longer need to visit court premises to file documents. The introduction of online filing systems has made the process more convenient, accessible, and accurate. Litigants can file documents from anywhere at any time, benefiting those in remote areas who previously faced difficulties reaching courts physically. It has also lightened the burden on court staff, reducing physical file handling. Additionally, the system includes validation checks and prompts, ensuring all necessary information and supporting documents are provided, thus minimizing errors and delays in case processing. Furthermore, online filing systems create electronic records of filings, enabling easy tracking and retrieval of documents when needed, improving transparency and accountability in the judicial process. Parties can access and view their filed documents, monitor case progress online, and efficiently share documents with their lawyers and the court. Overall, the e-Committee's introduction of online filing systems has transformed the filing process in

<sup>10</sup> *Supra note 1*, at 1.

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Indian courts, enhancing accessibility, efficiency, and transparency in the justice system. This embrace of technology represents a significant step towards streamlining access to justice for all stakeholders involved.<sup>11</sup>

## **5.2 VIDEO CONFERENCING:**

Recognizing the significance of remote hearings in ensuring access to justice, particularly in cases involving distant parties or witnesses, the e-committee of the Supreme Court of India has actively endorsed the utilization of video conferencing facilities in courts. Video conferencing enables participants to attend court proceedings from different locations through audio and video communication technology, eliminating the need for physical presence and mitigating the challenges associated with travel, time, and expenses.<sup>12</sup> This technology facilitates the expeditious resolution of cases by allowing seamless communication between different locations, ensuring the participation of all relevant parties without significant disruptions. It is especially valuable in urgent matters or cases involving individuals who are unable to travel due to health or other reasons. Moreover, video conferencing enhances the efficiency of court proceedings by reducing the time required for hearings and eliminating adjournments caused by logistical challenges. As a result, court processes become more streamlined and productive, allowing for a greater number of cases to be handled within a given timeframe. Additionally, video conferencing brings cost savings for litigants who can avoid travel expenses and accommodation costs, while courts can optimize resources by reducing physical space and infrastructure requirements for participants. The e-committee's adoption of video conferencing reflects a commitment to leveraging technology for the advancement of access to justice. By embracing remote hearings, the committee aims to overcome geographical barriers, improve efficiency, and enhance convenience for all stakeholders involved in the legal system.

## **5.3 DIGITIZATION OF RECORDS:**

<sup>11</sup> Bhardwaj, Raj Kumar. "The Indian judicial system: Transition from print to digital." *Legal Information Management* 13.3 (2013): 203-208.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph, Alex, and Versha Vahini, "Is the Indian judiciary prepared for technological revolution finally? A critical analysis of judicial functioning in the COVID world", 43 JPSP 6756, 6819-6825 (2022).

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The e-committee of the Supreme Court of India has embarked on a noteworthy initiative to digitize court records. This effort involves converting physical case files, judgments, and other pertinent documents into digital formats. The primary goal is to preserve these records and make them easily accessible to all stakeholders involved in the judicial process. Digitizing court records offers several advantages, notably enhanced efficiency. By eliminating the need for physical storage, courts can save space and reduce the risk of damage or loss. Digital records can be securely stored on servers or cloud platforms, enabling efficient management and retrieval. This streamlines administrative processes, allowing court staff to quickly search, retrieve, and share records, leading to a more streamlined workflow. Furthermore, digitization improves accessibility. Unlike physical records confined to specific locations, digital records can be accessed from anywhere with an internet connection. Litigants, lawyers, judges, and researchers can remotely access digitized records, saving time and resources. This enhances convenience and promotes open access to legal information, supporting informed decision-making and the principle of open justice. Digitization also contributes to record preservation and security. Physical records are vulnerable to environmental factors, while digital copies can be easily backed up and protected through robust security measures. This ensures the long-term preservation of critical legal documents, including historical records and precedents, which are invaluable for legal research and the development of jurisprudence.<sup>13</sup> Overall, the e-committee's digitization of court records is a significant step toward modernizing the judicial system. It improves efficiency, accessibility, and the security of legal information. By embracing digital solutions, courts can streamline operations, enhance transparency, and ensure the availability of relevant records to facilitate the administration of justice.

#### **5.4 ONLINE CASE STATUS TRACKING:**

The e-committee of the Supreme Court of India has successfully introduced online case status tracking systems, which have greatly improved transparency and convenience in

<sup>13</sup> Meghavaram, Benerji, "Information and Communication Technology in Indian Judiciary-Stepping Digitization", 11 Nir.ULJ 51, 54-55 (2021).

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the legal system. These systems allow litigants and lawyers to access real-time information about their cases, upcoming hearings, and court orders through dedicated portals or websites. One of the key benefits of these systems is the elimination of the need for physical visits to the court for case updates. Previously, individuals had to spend time and effort traveling to the court premises, but now they can conveniently retrieve the required information from anywhere at any time using their computers or mobile devices connected to the internet. This saves valuable time and resources for all parties involved in the legal process. Moreover, the online case status tracking systems contribute to transparency by making case-related information available to the public. This promotes accountability and allows litigants and lawyers to stay informed about the progress of their cases. The transparency established by these systems builds trust in the legal system and enables individuals to closely monitor the status of their cases. Additionally, the systems enhance case management and coordination among judges, lawyers, and court staff. All stakeholders have access to the same information, facilitating effective communication and decision-making. This streamlines workflow and ensures that everyone is well-informed about the status of each case. Overall, the implementation of online case status tracking systems by the e-committee has revolutionized information access and management in the Indian judicial system. It empowers litigants and lawyers by providing convenient access to crucial case updates and promotes transparency and efficiency in the legal process. This initiative aligns with the broader objective of facilitating access to justice and improving the overall functioning of the Indian judiciary.<sup>14</sup>

## **5.5 LEGAL INFORMATION PORTALS:**

The legal information portals developed by the e-committee of the Supreme Court of India have revolutionized access to legal knowledge and literacy. These online platforms serve as centralized repositories of legal resources, allowing users to efficiently search and access statutes, judgments, legal precedents, and other legal

<sup>14</sup> National Policy and Action Plan for Implementation of Information and Communication Technology in The Indian Judiciary, <https://main.sci.gov.in/pdf/ecommittee/action-plan-ecourt.pdf> (last visited June 15, 2023).



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documents. Lawyers benefit from these portals by having quick and convenient access to relevant case laws, statutes, and legal opinions, enabling comprehensive research and informed legal strategies. Researchers and scholars also find these portals valuable for academic pursuits and contributing to legal scholarship. Importantly, these portals empower the general public by providing simplified legal texts, explanations of legal terms, and guides on legal procedures, promoting legal literacy and enabling individuals to understand their legal rights and responsibilities. This bridges the gap between the legal system and the public, promoting access to justice. Moreover, the transparency brought by these portals enhances public trust in the legal system, as citizens can read and understand court decisions, ensuring justice is dispensed in a transparent manner. The e-committee collaborates with legal experts, academicians, and publishers to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the information provided, with regular updates and efforts to make the portals accessible to people with disabilities.<sup>15</sup> Overall, the legal information portals developed by the e-committee democratize access to legal knowledge, promoting legal literacy, transparency, and accountability in the Indian judicial system.

## **5.6 DIGITAL PAYMENT FACILITIES:**

The e-committee of the Supreme Court of India has taken significant steps to promote the use of digital payment facilities in courts. By encouraging the adoption of digital payment methods, the committee aims to reduce the reliance on cash transactions and facilitate a more convenient and secure payment process for litigants. Traditionally, the payment of court fees, fines, and other charges involved physical visits to the court premises and cash transactions, which were time-consuming and posed security risks. With the implementation of digital payment facilities, litigants can now make payments online through various digital modes, such as credit/debit cards, net banking, and mobile wallets. This eliminates the need for physical cash transactions and reduces associated risks. Furthermore, digital payment facilities promote financial inclusion,

<sup>15</sup> Narayan, Uma, "Indian initiative to provide free access to authentic legal information", 9 IJLHM 356, 358-359, (2013).

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enabling litigants from remote areas to make payments electronically, eliminating geographical barriers. The e-committee's efforts in promoting digital payment facilities align with the broader goal of digitizing the judicial system in India, creating a more accessible and user-friendly environment for litigants, lawyers, and court staff while enhancing the overall efficiency and transparency of the judicial system.

### **5.7 E-LIBRARIES:**

The e-committee of the Supreme Court of India recognizes the importance of legal research and access to legal resources. To facilitate this, the committee has focused on establishing digital libraries in courts. These e-libraries provide authorized users with easy access to a wide range of legal materials, including textbooks, case laws, statutes, and research papers. They serve as comprehensive repositories of legal knowledge, allowing judges, lawyers, and court staff to conduct research, stay updated with legal developments, and enhance their understanding of the law. By eliminating the need for physical storage and providing remote access, e-libraries reduce space constraints and the risk of damage or loss of legal resources. They may also include online databases and specialized resources, promoting efficient and authoritative research. Additionally, e-libraries can foster collaboration and knowledge sharing among legal professionals, creating a platform for discussions, and sharing research findings. Overall, the establishment of e-libraries by the e-committee promotes access to justice by empowering legal professionals to conduct thorough research and contribute to the effective administration of justice.

These initiatives collectively aim to enhance access to justice by leveraging technology and promoting transparency, efficiency, and convenience in the Indian judicial system. By adopting digital solutions and embracing innovative approaches, the e-committee of the Supreme Court of India is working towards ensuring that justice is accessible to all, irrespective of geographical limitations or logistical constraints.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Taher, Mohammad Abu, and Siti Zaharah Jamaluddin, *ENHANCING ACCESS TO JUSTICE THROUGH E-JUDICIARY IN BANGLADESH: A STUDY*, 13 UUM.JLS 315, 317-344 (2022).

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## **6. TRAINING OF JUDGES AND ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF IN COURTS:**

**The creation of support systems through the development of policies and an implementation plan in the following areas is one of the references made to the E-Committee<sup>17</sup>.**

- a) To develop training for court administrators and judges.
- b) To assemble a team of trainers and trouble shooters for each court complex.
- c) To offer strategies for ensuring the efficient operation of computer systems, including their accessibility to a power source, peripherals, stationary, etc.
- d) To provide recommendations for improving information accessibility and access to justice for litigants.

The E-Committee of the Indian judiciary collaborated with DOEACC, an organization operating under the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, to develop training modules and strategies for judges and court staff. DOEACC, a non-profit society established by the government, specializes in providing ICT awareness and learning courses. The training modules were designed for both entry-level and in-service training of judicial officers and consisted of 90-94 sessions lasting 112 hours each. The training was scheduled after court hours to ensure participation. Upon completion, judicial officials would receive a certificate of effective completion, evaluated through intermediate and final skill tests and approved by the Chief Justice and the Chairman of the E-Committee. A pilot training program was launched for 100 judicial officials of the Delhi District Judiciary, with the support of the Delhi High Court and the Delhi Judicial Academy. The program received positive feedback from participants, and the E-Committee planned to make necessary adjustments based on their suggestions, as well as input from the academy and the high court. A similar curriculum was being developed for other court workers, with a shorter duration of about two weeks. The training was proposed to take place at the relevant court locations, possibly on weekends at the district headquarters. The E-Committee believed that DOEACC, as a central government agency, was best suited to provide the necessary ICT training to judges and court employees.

<sup>17</sup> Notification of Government of India dated Dec. 28, 2004.

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*The National Informatics Centre (NIC)* would collaborate with the E-Committee to establish the terms and conditions for DOEACC to deliver the training program through its own faculty or approved institutions, ensuring effective implementation and supervision.

## **7. DIGITISATION OF STATUTE LAWS:**

In India, courts carry out their adjudicatory duties by gathering the relevant evidence and principally implementing the relevant statutory laws, which are then subject to interpretation by the Supreme Court and the High Courts. The President of India, the different State legislatures, the Governors of the States, and their delegates make the statutory legislation.<sup>18</sup> Acts, ordinances, rules, regulations, notifications, orders, and so on are the names for these. These laws must be published in the Official Gazettes in order to be enforced. Even though these laws are crucial for adjudicatory procedures, they are frequently unavailable in updated versions, which causes either a delay in justice or, more frequently, a miscarriage of justice.<sup>19</sup> As a result, using the technology at hand, proper solutions must be developed to make all such laws available to courts online in an updated version as soon as those laws are drafted and put into effect. The E-Committee proposes to create software that is appropriate for making all statute laws accessible and to come up with strategies for keeping such laws digitally with the necessary search capabilities online. The services of the judicial academies can be used to scan and store such statutes.<sup>20</sup> The common law system includes the Indian judicial system. A fundamental and essential component of this system is the law of precedent, which has been established over many years. The law of precedent is now recognised by the Indian constitution. According to Article 141 of the Indian Constitution, all courts located on Indian territory must abide by the law that the Supreme Court of India has declared. Similarly, as ruled by the Supreme Court, all courts that fall under the jurisdiction of the respective High Courts must abide by the law that those High Courts have stated. The Supreme Court's and High Court's rulings must be quickly accessible with the necessary search tools in order to comply

<sup>18</sup> Akhila Pai, "Evaluation of Indian E-Judiciary System", 5 INT'L JRRAR 672, 681 (2021).

<sup>19</sup> Digital Courts Vision & Roadmap, [https://www.livelaw.in/pdf\\_upload/digital-courts-e-courts-project-supreme-court-e-committee-391425.pdf](https://www.livelaw.in/pdf_upload/digital-courts-e-courts-project-supreme-court-e-committee-391425.pdf) (last visited June 11, 2023).

<sup>20</sup> Gopal, Sumathi, "Issues & Challenges faced in Digitalization of Courts", 13 SRJ 1, 1-6, (2018).

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with this regulation. Utilising ICT, it is now possible. E-Committee proposes to develop the necessary web-enabled software to achieve this end.<sup>21</sup>

## **8. DIGITAL ARCHIVES:**

Suggested system to preserve, administer, and retrieve the judicial records as needed, qualified personnel has been hired. Because the condition of the ancient documents deteriorates daily, maintaining them becomes exceedingly challenging. The need for storage space grows along with the amount of files, making it more challenging to search for and retrieve files. Now more than ever, these records need to be created via digital methods. Each file's document can be scanned and stored using a computer and scanner in a way that makes retrieval simple. Indexing, searching, retrieval, access, printing, and displaying documents can all be done with the help of document management software. This software will include features like multilevel security and web enablement. These digital files can be safely stored on CDs or magnetic tape. These digital archives must be done properly at 26 of the 600 locations that house record rooms. The current workforce can receive the necessary training and skills development for the archival work digitalization process. No extra personnel will be needed for this task. Computers, powerful scanners, printers, and document management software will be needed as infrastructure. Because the programme will be web-based, the record can be kept in several places. The CD will be used to hold the backup. Networking allows for the preservation of important files and more convenient access to papers. Even this procedure can be carried out remotely from a location where a network can view a document. To meet the needs of the court system, the standard document management software package can be purchased and customised. Each location has the ability to organise employee training. E-Committee will be in charge of arranging the training through a nodal organisation and modifying the software. Three to five years will pass before the digitising process is completed.

## **9. INTER-CONNECTIVITY OF LAW LIBRARIES:**

<sup>21</sup> Balakrishnan, K. G., *JUDICIARY IN INDIA: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS*, 50 JILI 450, 461-467 (2008).



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The inter-connectivity of law libraries in the digital age enables efficient legal research, knowledge sharing, and collaboration. Online resources, integrated systems, and databases connect law libraries, allowing users to access a vast amount of legal information from various jurisdictions. This interconnectedness reduces the need for physical spaces and redundant collections, saving time and effort. It also facilitates global collaboration, enabling legal professionals to stay updated on international legal developments and comparative law. Inter-connectivity promotes access to diverse perspectives, enhances research capabilities, and supports the development of legal scholarship. Overall, it plays a crucial role in facilitating information sharing, improving research efficiency, and advancing the field of law.

## **10. LIMITATION OF INITIATIVES TAKEN BY E-COMMITTEE OF SUPREME COURT FOR FACILITATING ACCESS TO JUSTICE:**

**While the initiatives taken by the e-Committee of the Supreme Court aim to facilitate access to justice, they do have certain limitations. Some of these limitations include:**

- ✚ **Digital Divide:** One of the major challenges is the digital divide, where a significant portion of the population lacks access to technology or the necessary digital skills. This hampers their ability to take advantage of the online platforms and services provided by the e-Committee.
- ✚ **Infrastructure and Connectivity:** In many parts of the country, especially rural areas, there are issues with inadequate internet connectivity and unreliable power supply. These infrastructural limitations hinder the smooth functioning of online platforms and may lead to disruptions in accessing justice remotely.
- ✚ **Language and Localization:** While efforts are made to provide multilingual interfaces, there may still be limitations in terms of localization, especially for regional languages. This can create barriers for individuals who are not proficient in English or Hindi.
- ✚ **Privacy and Data Security:** The digital nature of the initiatives raises concerns about privacy and data security. Safeguarding sensitive legal information and ensuring secure

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transmission of data is crucial to maintain the integrity and confidentiality of legal proceedings.

✚ **Technological Literacy:** Users, including lawyers, litigants, and court staff, may require training and support to effectively navigate and utilize the digital platforms. Lack of technological literacy can impede the seamless adoption and utilization of online services.<sup>22</sup>

✚ **Inclusion of Vulnerable Sections:** It is essential to ensure that the initiatives cater to the needs of vulnerable sections of society, including those with disabilities or limited access to technology. Special provisions should be made to accommodate their requirements and provide equal access to justice.

Addressing these limitations is crucial to ensuring that the initiatives taken by the e-Committee effectively facilitate access to justice for all citizens, irrespective of their location, language proficiency, or digital literacy.<sup>23</sup>

## **11. SUGGESTIONS:**

**To address the limitations and further enhance the initiatives taken by the e-Committee of the Supreme Court for facilitating access to justice, the following suggestions can be considered:**

✚ **Bridging the Digital Divide:** Implement programs to bridge the digital divide by providing access to technology and digital literacy training in underserved areas. This can be done through partnerships with NGOs, community organizations, and government agencies.

✚ **Improved Infrastructure:** Invest in improving internet connectivity and power supply in rural areas to ensure seamless access to online platforms. This can involve collaboration with telecommunication companies and local authorities to expand and strengthen the digital infrastructure.

<sup>22</sup> Akshay Baburao, and Shivanjali Mane, "Online stream and recording of court proceedings: a constitutional right", 9 JLR 98, 101, (2022).

<sup>23</sup> Mahibha, G., and P. Balasubramanian, "A critical analysis of the significance of the eCourts information systems in Indian courts", 20 LIM 43, 47-53.

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- ✚ **Localization and Multilingual Support:** Enhance the localization of online platforms to cater to regional languages and ensure that legal information and services are accessible to individuals who are more comfortable in their native languages. This can involve collaboration with language experts and localization specialists.<sup>24</sup>
- ✚ **Robust Privacy and Data Security Measures:** Strengthen the privacy and data security measures of online platforms to install confidence among users. Regular audits, encryption protocols, and adherence to international standards can help protect sensitive legal information.
- ✚ **Technological Training and Support:** Offer comprehensive training programs to lawyers, litigants, and court staff on utilizing digital platforms effectively. This can include workshops, online tutorials, and dedicated support channels to address any technical issues or queries.<sup>25</sup>
- ✚ **Inclusive Design:** Ensure that online platforms and services are designed with accessibility in mind, considering the needs of individuals with disabilities. This can involve incorporating features such as screen readers, captioning, and alternative formats for visually impaired and hearing-impaired users.
- ✚ **Outreach and Awareness Programs:** Conduct awareness campaigns to educate the public about the availability and benefits of online legal services. This can involve disseminating information through various channels, including social media, radio, and community outreach programs.
- ✚ **User Feedback and Iterative Improvements:** Establish mechanisms for collecting user feedback on the digital platforms and services. Regularly assess the feedback and make iterative improvements based on user needs and preferences.

By implementing these suggestions, the e-Committee can further enhance access to justice, promote inclusivity, and overcome the limitations faced in facilitating legal services through digital platforms.

<sup>24</sup> Aggarwal, Ketan, *Indian Justice Delivery System and Pendency of Cases*, 2 LEJ 210, 213 (2021).

<sup>25</sup> Singh, Ajay Pal, *Virtual Courts during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Critical Exposition*, 24 SAJ. 450, 451-452 (2021).

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## **12. CONCLUSION:**

In conclusion, the initiatives taken by the e-Committee of the Supreme Court of India have played a significant role in facilitating access to justice through the utilization of digital platforms and technology. These initiatives have aimed to bridge the gap between the legal system and citizens, making legal information and services more accessible, efficient, and inclusive. However, it is important to acknowledge that certain limitations exist, such as the digital divide, infrastructure challenges, language barriers, and concerns regarding privacy and data security. To overcome these limitations, it is crucial to address issues related to digital literacy, infrastructure, localization, privacy, and accessibility.

By implementing suggestions such as bridging the digital divide, improving infrastructure, providing multilingual support, ensuring data security, offering technological training and support, adopting inclusive design, conducting outreach programs, and incorporating user feedback, the e-Committee can further enhance access to justice for all citizens. Continued research and evaluation of these initiatives are necessary to measure their effectiveness, identify areas for improvement, and ensure that they are meeting the evolving needs of the justice system and the people it serves. With sustained efforts and advancements in technology, the e-Committee has the potential to transform the landscape of access to justice, empowering individuals, and promoting a more inclusive and efficient legal system in India.