BLOGS

Understanding the Hierarchy of the Indian Judiciary

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Questions on the **structure and hierarchy of the Indian judiciary** are frequently asked in CLAT, especially in Legal Reasoning and GK passages. To understand how laws are interpreted and enforced in India, every CLAT aspirant must clearly understand how courts are organised and how power flows from the lowest court to the highest court.

This article explains the hierarchy of the Indian judiciary in simple, clear language, keeping the CLAT exam perspective in mind.

Why the Judicial Hierarchy Matters for CLAT

The Indian judiciary follows a **hierarchical system**, which means courts are arranged in levels. Decisions of higher courts are binding on lower courts. This ensures uniformity in law and prevents confusion.

In CLAT, passages often test whether you understand:

- Which court has original or appellate jurisdiction
- Which court's decisions are binding
- Where a case can be appealed

Supreme Court of India: The Apex Court

At the top of the judicial hierarchy is the **Supreme Court of India**, established under **Article 124 of the Constitution**.

It is the highest court in the country, and its decisions are binding on all other courts under **Article 141**.

Jurisdiction of the Supreme Court

- Original jurisdiction in disputes between the Union and States under Article 131
- Appellate jurisdiction in civil, criminal, and constitutional matters
- Advisory jurisdiction, where the President can seek its opinion under Article 143
- Writ jurisdiction under Article 32 for enforcement of Fundamental Rights

For CLAT, remember that Article 32 is itself a Fundamental Right.

High Courts: Highest Courts in the States

Below the Supreme Court are the **High Courts**, established under **Article 214**. Every state has a High Court, though some High Courts serve more than one state or Union Territory.

High Courts are the highest judicial authority at the state level.

Jurisdiction of High Courts

- Original jurisdiction in certain matters, especially in constitutional issues
- Appellate jurisdiction over lower courts in the state
- Writ jurisdiction under Article 226, which is wider than that of the Supreme Court

High Courts can issue writs not only for Fundamental Rights but also for other legal rights.

Subordinate Judiciary: District and Lower Courts

Below the High Courts is the **subordinate judiciary**, which deals with the majority of cases in India.

District Courts

District Courts are the **highest courts at the district level**. They are headed by a District Judge.

District Courts handle:

- Civil cases like property disputes, contracts, and family matters
- Criminal cases, including serious offences

District Judges are appointed by the Governor in consultation with the High Court.

Civil Courts Below District Level

Below District Courts are various civil courts, such as:

- Civil Judge (Senior Division)
- Civil Judge (Junior Division)
- Munsif Courts in some states

These courts deal with civil disputes of lower monetary value.

Criminal Courts Below District Level

On the criminal side, courts include:

- Sessions Courts for serious criminal offences
- Chief Judicial Magistrate Courts
- Judicial Magistrate First Class and Second Class

Sessions Courts conduct trials for serious crimes and award severe punishments.

Special Courts and Tribunals

Apart from regular courts, India also has **special courts and tribunals** to handle specific matters.

Examples include:

- National Green Tribunal
- National Company Law Tribunal
- Consumer Courts
- Family Courts

Tribunals reduce the burden on regular courts and provide specialised justice. However, their decisions are subject to judicial review by High Courts and the Supreme Court.

Binding Nature of Judgments

One key concept CLAT aspirants must remember is **precedent**.

- Supreme Court judgments bind all courts
- High Court judgments bind subordinate courts within that state
- District Court judgments do not bind other courts

This concept is crucial for Legal Reasoning questions.

Conclusion

The hierarchy of the Indian judiciary ensures discipline, consistency, and accessibility of justice. From local courts at the district level to the Supreme Court at the national level, each court has a defined role.

For CLAT aspirants, understanding this hierarchy is not about memorisation alone. It is about knowing how justice moves through the system.

Once you clearly understand this structure, many Legal Reasoning and GK questions become much easier to handle.