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THE ROLE OF LEGAL EDUCATION IN INDIA

~ *Anannya Mohanty*

Indian legal education is a balanced weave that defines the Indian colonial experience, the country-building and nation-building endeavours post-independence and the modernist aspirations of having a strong and socially responsive legal system. India Legal education started during the British colonial rule and was strongly informed by British legal education models. In the year 1855, the Government Law College was founded at Bombay, and heralded the commencement of formal legal education in the country. This school was established to educate legal professionals to work with the colonial government following strictly the British curriculum and pedagogy that focuses on the common law tradition. The colonial legal education system was largely intended to provide graduates to practice before the British law system which was in most cases disconnected with local legal cultures and social reality. This was however the groundwork of systematic legal education and development of a legal profession in India¹.

After independence, the nation attempted to make legal education a tool of justice, social transformation and governance in line with the principles of democracy. There was tremendous institutional development that occurred under the jurisdiction of Bar Council of India (BCI) which was formed in 1961 by the Advocates Act. The BCI was tasked with the control of the legal profession and legal education, the establishment of standards in institutions providing law degrees, and the fulfilment of legal education according to the requirements of the independent and diverse nation. This was in conjunction with the University Grants Commission (UGC) which was established in 1956 to manage the standards of higher

¹ History of Legal Education in India, SCRIBD (2025); Indian Inst. of Legal Stud., Development of Legal Education in India (IILS India 2023); Legal Education in India: Historical Evolution and the NEP, IJFMR (2025); Legal Education in India, Nyaya Shastra (2025); Evolution of Legal Education in India, SLIDESHARE (2020); Legal Education in India, WIKIPEDIA (2009); Radhakrishnan Commission Report on Legal Education (1953)

education such as law colleges and universities. The combination of these institutions led to the growth of legal education in India, with a view to balancing professional education with a wider education objective. The issues of quality, relevance, and accessibility led to a number of reforms in the legal education system over time².

Legal education in India has a constitutional and legislative basis that is based on the main provisions of statutory law and constitutional values. The foundation law that governs the legal profession and legal education is the Advocates Act, 1961. It gives the Bar Council of India the authority to prescribe legal education standards and also recognize law qualification in universities or other institutions. This is supplemented by Bar Council of India Rules, which establish curricula and instructions on the number of instructional hours, clinical training, examinations etc so that the process can be consistent across different institutions. These standards are further enforced by the University Grants Commission which requires accreditation and adherence to academic norms of quality. The significance of legal education as a means of justice and democracy is also emphasized by the provisions of the constitution. Article 19(1) (a) ensures the right to freedom of speech and expression which is a fundamental right and is related to this requirement of legal literacy and critical legal awareness. Article 21, the right to life and personal liberty, indirectly promotes legal assistance and justice, which is promoted by effective legal education. Article 39A explicitly instructs the state to offer free legal assistance to prevent that justice is not withheld because of economic or other incapacities, which is the role of the educated legal professionals in the society in the maintenance of these rights. Taken together, these directives in the constitution reveal that legal education in India is not merely a profession-training exercise but an important aspect in the establishment of a positive justice system and legal empowerment of all citizens³.

Indian legal education has been changing its institutional structure to suit the needs and methods in a variety of ways. Historically, instruction in law was done over a period of three years as an undergraduate course that was followed after graduation in a bachelors degree

² Advocates Act, 1961, No. 25, Acts of Parliament, 1961 (India); The Advocates Act, 1961, Ministry of L. & Just., India; Advocates Act, 1961 Overview, IPL (2024); Role of Bar Council of India in Regulation and Promotion of Legal Education, LBP World (2024); Bar Council of India Legal Education Rules, Bar Council of India (2008); Challenges in Legal Education: Faculty and Infrastructure, UGC Reports; Indian Council for Legal Education & National Accreditation Agency for Legal Education, SSRN (2016).

³ Advocates Act, 1961, No. 25; Bar Council of India Legal Education Rules, Bar Council of India (2008); Legal Education and Constitutional Values, Indian Const. L.J.; Legal Education and Social Justice, L. Comm'n of India Working Papers; Legal Education and Access to Justice, NALSA Publications; Legal Literacy and Empowerment Through Education, UNDP India; Legal Education in India: Historical Evolution and the NEP, IJFMR (2025).

course in any field. This paradigm was common in the majority of state-owned colleges and universities and was mostly based on theoretical training. Nevertheless, the major breakthrough was the five year integrated law courses which students are able to pursue immediately after high school. The National Law Universities (NLUs) were the first to adopt this model, the first one being the National Law School of India University (NLSIU) of Bangalore, in 1987. The NLUs revolutionized legal education through the provision of an inter-disciplinary curriculum that emphasizes law, humanities, social sciences, and professional skills at the beginning of the course. Most state government colleges and some private universities have implemented either or both models besides NLUs, and have increased access and diversity in legal education options⁴.

One of the most significant changes in the field of legal education was the Curriculum Reforms of the Bar Council of India in 2008 which were expected to reform the parameters of teaching and make the classroom environment more in touch with the realities of the profession. The reforms focused on introduction of clinical legal education, which provides practical training in legal aid clinics, internship and court visits as a way of providing students with the opportunity to use the theoretical knowledge to real world scenarios. The moot courts were introduced as part of the curriculum, which encouraged advocacy skills, ability to reason and do research. The reforms were also a stimulus to add internships to law firms, judicial offices, and NGOs to expose the students to dynamics of different areas of the legal ecosystem. The aim of these changes was to reconcile academic legal teaching with the dynamic nature of the legal practice and place greater emphasis on experiential learning and social responsibility⁵.

Although these have been made, there are constant challenges in the assurances of quality, standards and accreditation of the rapidly growing field of law education. Regular inspections of law schools are done by Bar Council of India to determine their adherence to standards to be followed by the law schools, yet there is still a high level of instability of the capabilities of the institutions. Universities and colleges, including law schools, are also evaluated by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), which focuses on the quality of the

⁴ About NLSIU, National Law Sch. of India Univ. (2025); National Law Universities (NLUs): Need for Nationalization, iPleaders (2020); Legal Education in India, Nyaya Shastra (2025); Legal Education in India, WIKIPEDIA (2009); The Quality of India's Legal Education, WWJMRD (2025)

⁵ Bar Council of India Legal Education Rules, Bar Council of India (2008); Legal Education Reforms and Curriculum Development, Bar Council of India Reports; All India Bar Examination and Legal Education Reforms, BCI Reports (2010); Clinical Legal Education in India, NALSAR Univ. Research Paper; Clinical Legal Education: An Effective Method of Law Teaching in India, IJFANS; Experiential Learning and Legal Education, Indian L. Rev.; An Analysis of Clinical Legal Education in India, Int'l J. Legal Dev. & Allied Issues (2023)

academic programs, research work, and the facilities and the qualification of the faculty. However, the gaps in faculty competence are still broad, as most of the institutions have a lack of competent law teachers with sufficient research experience. There is a significant difference in the research facilities and infrastructure such as libraries, legal databases, and technology access between urban and rural institutions, which affects the quality of legal education offered⁶.

The differences affect the employability and skills preparedness of law graduates where most fresh graduates are not ready with any practical skills or specialization to act in the employment market. There are regulatory tools which have a hard time enforcing equal quality in both public and privately-operated law schools, and this creates disproportionate quality of legal education. In addition, little focus is placed on the ongoing professional growth of the law educators themselves, which limits the pedagogical innovation and research culture. This has been compounded by the inadequate number of law colleges which have mushroomed over the past twenty years without attendant resource and teacher training⁷.

Legal education in India is a significant key towards helping to provide access to justice as the result of producing socially responsible lawyers not legal technicians but those who also represent social change and empowerment of the people. Legal education is also considered as one of the crucial social institutions that not only supports professional training but also promotes legal literacy among citizens, thereby increasing their consciousness on rights and remedies that they can get in law. This is an important part of legal education that supports the gap between the legal system and marginalized communities that tend to find obstacles on their way towards accessing justice. The law schools in India have increasingly incorporated the legal aid clinics in their curriculum and they are the fields where students get to experience the real world legal scenarios that need a solution and that concern the disadvantaged of society. Such clinics are free in offering legal advice and help, creating a culture of pro bono service in future attorneys. By direct involvement in the community, students become more aware of the

⁶ National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), India Government Website; The Quality of India's Legal Education, WWJMRD (2025); A Study of Legal Education in India: Challenges & Reforms, Worldwide Journals (2025); Mismanagement of Legal Education in India, iPleaders (2021); Challenges in Legal Education: Faculty and Infrastructure, UGC Reports; Indian Council for Legal Education & National Accreditation Agency for Legal Education, SSRN (2016)

⁷ The Quality of India's Legal Education, WWJMRD (2025); Mismanagement of Legal Education in India, iPleaders (2021); A Study of Legal Education in India: Challenges & Reforms, Worldwide Journals (2025); Challenges in Legal Education: Faculty and Infrastructure, UGC Reports; Legal Education in India, Nyaya Shastra (2025)

realities of the society, the practical application of the law, and, at the same time, they are helping the welfare of the community⁸.

The encouragement of pro bono culture in the legal profession is closely connected with the educational stress on social responsibility. Law education fosters the commitment to justice that is not necessarily commercial or career oriented by encouraging law students and practicing lawyers to volunteer their services to those who cannot afford to hire an attorney. Additionally, law schools are significant towards developing the public interest litigation (PIL) that has emerged as a critical instrument in the Indian legal system in dealing with systemic injustices and policy failures. Legal education provides the student with skills to start and be part of PILs through research, case preparation and advocacy training, thus matching the judiciary with the capacity to be a protector of the general interest. All these initiatives work together to enhance community participation, empower citizens and increase the scope of the legal protection and bring the democratic value that everyone is entitled to justice⁹.

Although these are good steps, modern legal education in India is still experiencing a number of challenges that limit its efficiency and overall influence in the society. Among the most frequently mentioned complaints are the use of outdated curriculum which is often far too theoretical and lacks any real world connection with actual legal practice and social transformation. Most of the law schools continue to advance a lecture style rather than interactive and skills-oriented learning and do not give the students enough time to master litigation, negotiation, and legal drafting skills. The consequence of the lack of hands-on training is a shortage of graduates with a sufficient preparation to meet the requirements of the legal profession. Also, there is a strong regional and institutional inequality between the top-tier National Law Universities (NLUs) and other state-run or privately owned law colleges. NLUs usually have good resources, have high caliber faculty and offer a high variety of courses

⁸ Role of Legal Education in Advancement of Access to Justice, SAGE Journals (2024); Legal Aid Through Law Schools, Centre for Research & Planning, Supreme Court of India (2024); Legal Education and Access to Justice, NALSA Publications; Legal Literacy and Empowerment Through Education, UNDP India; Legal Education and Social Justice, L. Comm'n of India Working Papers; Legal Aid Clinic, Chanakya Law College (2023); Clinical Legal Education in India, NALSAR Univ. Research Paper; Access to Justice in India: A Report, Harvard CLP (2023)

⁹ Public Interest Litigation and Legal Education, Supreme Court Judgments 2010–2025; Legal Education and Social Justice, L. Comm'n of India Working Papers; Role of Legal Education in Advancement of Access to Justice, SAGE Journals (2024); Legal Education and Access to Justice, NALSA Publications; Access to Justice in India: A Report, Harvard CLP (2023)

and practical learning experience, whereas many smaller institutions are dealing with limited infrastructure, fewer research programs and less exposure to modern legal trends¹⁰.

The output of Indian law schools is still poor especially when compared to international standards. Faculty members have a high workload and do not have enough incentives or institutional resources to engage in scholarly research. This has hampered the emergence of a dynamic academic culture that would be useful in reforming the legal and policy discussions. Moreover, industry and academia interactions and collaboration are usually restricted, which leads to the development of a curriculum that does not entirely capture the new trends in law and legal market demands. Students are thus deprived of the internship programs, mentorship and exposure of the emerging fields including corporate law, intellectual property and cyber law. The digital divide intensifies such problems, as not all institutions and students have equal access to digital resources and technology, which prevents using innovative legal research resources and online databases and distance learning modules¹¹.

Access to quality legal education is also limited due to financial factors and other socio-economic inequities, which supports systemic inequities. The high prices of certain private universities and the presence of the best institutions in big cities put disadvantages to the students with rural and economically disadvantaged background. Although there is reservation policy and scholarships there is an unequal application and still there is inadequate financing to fill the gap in totality. All these problems cumulatively deter the integrity of the inclusive value of legal education, which is its capacity to act as a useful channel of social justice and empowerment¹².

The world is globalizing and the world is becoming more technologically advanced, bringing dynamic changes in the field of legal education, which requires changes that are being gradually adopted in the Indian law schools. The introduction of AI-based legal research tools has disrupted the process of statutory, case law, and regulation analysis by law students and

¹⁰ The Quality of India's Legal Education, WWJMRD (2025); Mismanagement of Legal Education in India, iPleaders (2021); A Study of Legal Education in India: Challenges & Reforms, Worldwide Journals (2025); National Law Universities (NLUs): Need for Nationalization, iPleaders (2020); About NLSIU, National Law Sch. of India Univ. (2025)

¹¹ The Quality of India's Legal Education, WWJMRD (2025); A Study of Legal Education in India: Challenges & Reforms, Worldwide Journals (2025); Challenges in Legal Education: Faculty and Infrastructure, UGC Reports; International Collaborations in Legal Education, Indian J. Comp. L.; Role of Technology in Legal Education, Indian J.L. & Tech.; AI Tools and Legal Research in India, Indian J. Legal Stud. (2024)

¹² Disparities in Legal Education in India, Econ. & Pol. Wkly (2024); Access to Justice in India: A Report, Harvard CLP (2023); Legal Needs in Rural India, Harvard CLP Conference Paper (2023); Legal Education and Social Justice, L. Comm'n of India Working Papers; NEP 2020 and Legal Education in India, Ministry of Educ., India.

professionals making the research process more efficient and comprehensive. Online dispute resolution (ODR) websites have started having a role in terms of shaping the law practice by offering alternative ways of law courts in that way new pedagogical strategies need to be developed that will equip students with how to navigate the legal landscape of the hybrid courtroom. Virtual internships are particularly becoming more popular in the post-pandemic world, with the possible advantage of students getting to work remotely with law firms, non-governmental organizations, and government agencies worldwide, eliminating geographical limitations and increasing the experiential learning experience¹³.

The global partnerships also add diversity to the Indian legal education market through importing the perspectives of comparative law and world-best practices, promoting multidisciplinary and cross-border legal studies. The globalization has also led Indian universities to modernize their curricula and systems to meet the international standards, introduce international law, human rights, trade law, and environmental law, and focus on cross-cultural negotiation and global advocacy, among other skills. Such trends bring Indian legal education closer to more traditional, practice-oriented holistic pedagogy, which will prepare students to face domestic and international legal issues¹⁴.

In addition to technical knowledge and skills, knowledge on the law is important in socio-legal matters of creating awareness of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, which is a central vision of the Indian Constitution. The law schools have the mandate to prepare future lawyers as professionals not merely in the art of the law but as ethical practitioners who believe in the concept of justice and the ideals of the constitution. This is most important in instilling professional ethics, which includes matters relating to client confidentiality, conflict of interest, and advocacy and judicial process integrity. Also, social accountability compels law students to understand the broader consequences of their services to the society, particularly vulnerable groups, environmental sustainability, and social equity. Gender sensitivity is another critical aspect of modern legal education, and gender justice, laws combating violence against women and minorities, and sensitization courses challenging prejudices and stereotypes, are all being

¹³ Role of Technology in Legal Education, *Indian J.L. & Tech.*; AI Tools and Legal Research in India, *Indian J. Legal Stud.* (2024); International Collaborations in Legal Education, *Indian J. Comp. L.*; NEP 2020 and Legal Education in India, Ministry of Educ., India.

¹⁴ International Collaborations in Legal Education, *Indian J. Comp. L.*; Legal Education in India: Historical Evolution and the NEP, *IJFMR* (2025); NEP 2020 and Legal Education in India, Ministry of Educ., India.

taught in law schools. These moral and social aspects make sure that the legal education will be rooted in the larger objective of inclusive justice and governance¹⁵.

With the complex nature and the changing demands, legal education in India needs to be reformed on a wholesome basis. Regulatory control should be strengthened to make uniformity in quality standards in all institutions so that the differences should be minimized and the overall quality of legal training can be increased. The regulatory bodies like Bar Council of India and the University Grants Commission need to co-operate and enforce strict accreditation procedures, development of the faculty, and obligatory standards of research output. Improving clinical and experiential learning elements, such as mandatory internships, legal aid clinics, and moot court competitions can make the students more prepared to practice and committed to social justice¹⁶.

Interdisciplinary methodology is essential in enhancing legal education and in providing students with problem-solving skills that are holistic in nature. The same inter-disciplinary cooperation with other disciplines like economics, political science, sociology, and technology, allow law graduates to approach complex legal-administrative problems and take an active part in the policy-making and governance. By encouraging a comprehensive research culture in law schools through incentives, infrastructure and collaboration platforms, innovations in legal thought and practice will be encouraged, and this will be of use to the academic community and the society in general¹⁷.

Review of curricula is an essential process that must keep up with the dynamic nature of legal environment that has been catalyzed by globalization, technological advances, and new legal issues like cybercrime, environmental degradation and transnational conflicts. Law schools ought to aggressively pursue partnerships with judicial officers, law practitioners, as well as policy-makers to make sure that curricula are up to date and practice-oriented. The introduction

¹⁵ Professional Ethics in Legal Education, BCI Publications; Legal Education and Constitutional Values, Indian Const. L.J.; Gender Sensitization in Legal Curriculum, NLU Delhi Research Study; Legal Education and Social Justice, L. Comm'n of India Working Papers; Legal Education and Access to Justice, NALSA Publications.

¹⁶ Legal Education Reforms and Curriculum Development, Bar Council of India Reports; Role of Bar Council of India in Regulation and Promotion of Legal Education, LBP World (2024); Challenges in Legal Education: Faculty and Infrastructure, UGC Reports; Clinical Legal Education in India, NALSAR Univ. Research Paper; Experiential Learning and Legal Education, Indian L. Rev.)

¹⁷ Legal Education in India: Historical Evolution and the NEP, IJFMR (2025); International Collaborations in Legal Education, Indian J. Comp. L.; Future Challenges and Reforms in Indian Legal Education, Indian Bar Council Journals; Challenges in Legal Education: Faculty and Infrastructure, UGC Reports.)

of flexible courses and streams of specialization will allow students to choose the specialization and their education according to their career interest and the needs of society¹⁸.

Finally, to make legal education as effective as it can be as an agent of social justice, democracy, and legal professionalism in India, reform efforts should aim at changing the quality, inclusivity, innovation, and moral foundations. With the creation of regulatory rigor, experiential learning, interdisciplinary integration and strong research, Indian legal education may emerge as an active, responsive, and global competitor in the world that will help future lawyers serve society well and live up to the transformational vision of the Indian Constitution. This constant development demands a concerted action of the educational institutions, bar councils, government bodies and the legal fraternity to ensure that there is the establishment of a legal education system which is not only academically sound but also entrenched in the social set up and constitutional principles of justice to all¹⁹.

¹⁸ Legal Education Reforms and Curriculum Development, Bar Council of India Reports; NEP 2020 and Legal Education in India, Ministry of Educ., India; Future Challenges and Reforms in Indian Legal Education, Indian Bar Council Journals; Role of Technology in Legal Education, Indian J.L. & Tech.)

¹⁹ Legal Education in India: Historical Evolution and the NEP, IJFMR (2025); Future Challenges and Reforms in Indian Legal Education, Indian Bar Council Journals; Legal Education and Constitutional Values, Indian Const. L.J.; Legal Education and Social Justice, L. Comm'n of India Working Papers.