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BEYOND THE GAVEL: THE FUTURE OF LEGAL TECHNOLOGY IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

“Technology is no longer an option but a necessity in ensuring access to justice”¹

This powerful statement captures why legal technology today is not merely desirable but essential to a modern justice system.

Imagine a courtroom that never sleeps, where AI tools assist filing of pleadings, and hearings happen seamlessly regardless of the distance. In India, what seemed futuristic just a decade ago is becoming reality, driven by necessity during the pandemic and powered by the larger Digital India mission. Yet the question remains: Can AI ever replace the nuanced judgment of humans? And what must we protect, even as we modernise?

This blog particularly explores how Indian courts and lawyers navigate this modernised journey to avoid pitfalls and pave the way for a future that keeps justice human at its heart.

THE CURRENT LEGAL LANDSCAPE OF LEGAL TECH IN INDIA

India’s legal system does not exist in a vacuum. It is deeply shaped by history, language, diversity, practices and shares social and economic diversity across its state. The citizens of our country, especially in rural areas, still see courtrooms as a physical space of formality and ritual. Introducing technology into this setting is more than just installing computers. It challenges old habits, questions deeply rooted hierarchies and requires both lawyers and litigants to adapt to an unfamiliar interface.

¹ Former Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, *Technology is no longer an option but a necessity in ensuring access to justice* (speech, e-Courts Project Conference, 2020).

Today, India has approximately 5.1 crore cases² pending in different courts. In response, the government came up with an e-Court project³ in 2005 to develop the judiciary and improve the justice delivery system. This venture is targeted at creating electronic records through virtual means and streamlining case management processes. This led to tremendous improvement in the transformation of the judiciary by digitising records has minimised the use of physical space to store these records. Today, the National Judicial Data Grid⁴ (NJDG) reports over 14 crore case records digitised, making it easier to track pendency and case status.

Another appreciable change in the legal proceedings is the usage of virtual proceedings during the COVID-19 crisis⁵. This particularly upgraded the use of technology by conducting hearings through video conferencing, and there was no stagnation in the professional justice throughout the country by various courts. For example, the Delhi High Court conducted over 50,000 video conferences⁶ during the COVID-19 outbreak, to continue the crucial cases even during lockdown.

The implementation of e-filing⁷ has been adopted in over 3500 courts, along with the NJDG. The portal made the availability of case status transparent for the litigants.

As per the Times of India⁸ on July 5, Law Minister Kapil Mishra incorporated an E-Library to integrate artificial intelligence in the court. With initial funding of 20 lakhs, the Bar Council of Delhi functionary told TOI that they are planning the expansion of the library to be accessed anywhere. The library has legal research platforms like SCC online, Manupatra AI and Lucio, and an AI platform along with several e-books across 15 desktops. Advocate Niraj, President of Central Delhi Bar Court Association, shared the vision behind this initiative is to help law practitioners in their research.

² National Judicial Data Grid Dashboard, <https://njdg.ecourts.gov.in>

³ e-Courts Mission Mode Project (2005), Ministry of Law & Justice, Govt. of India, <https://ecourts.gov.in>

⁴ According to the National Judicial Data Grid, over 14 crore case records have been digitised. <https://njdg.ecourts.gov.in>.

⁵ "Virtual hearings in Mumbai family courts during pandemic." The Times of India.

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/virtual-hearings-in-mumbai-family-courts-during->

⁶ "Over 50,000 virtual hearings conducted during pandemic: Delhi High Court." Hindustan Times.

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/delhi-news/over-50-000-virtual-hearings-conducted-during-pandemic-delhi-high-court-101624788421493.html>.

⁷ Tech Integration in Indian Judiciary: Lessons from E-Filing, BAR & BENCH

<https://www.barandbench.com/columns/tech-integration-in-indian-judiciary-lessons-from-e-filing>.

⁸ E-Research Library with AI Tools to Assist Lawyers, TIMES OF INDIA (July 5, 2025),

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/e-research-library-with-ai-tools-to-assist-lawyers/articleshow/122348095.cms>

CHALLENGES AND ETHICAL CONCERNS

While India's push toward digital courts and AI-powered tools marks undeniable progress, this transformation comes with deep and layered challenges that risk leaving the very people it hopes to empower further behind.

A Bar & Bench column notes that although e-filing systems are a breakthrough for efficiency, they often remain fragmented and face practical resistance from digitally untrained practitioners. Many lawyers, especially those from smaller towns and older generations, hesitate to shift from paper filings and physical appearances to screens. Furthermore, this initiative is creating a way towards a digital divide, where the vulnerable group remains with no legal support.

Meanwhile, the rural-urban digital divide continues to deepen inequality. An IAMAI 2019⁹ report found that only 11% of India's rural population is digitally literate, and courts like the Rajasthan High Court struggle to engage rural litigants online due to connectivity and low computer literacy.

On another front, the judiciary has begun integrating AI tools like SUPACE (Supreme Court Portal for Assistance in Court Efficiency)¹⁰, launched in 2021, to help judges sift through complex documents and summarise cases. While promising, this raises questions of data protection, algorithmic bias, and transparency. As a Manupatra Academy article¹¹ warns, deploying AI in sensitive areas like criminal justice must be paired with a robust regulatory framework to protect citizens' rights.

Furthermore, research such as "Are Models Trained on Indian Legal Data Fair?"¹² shows AI models risk reinforcing existing caste and gender biases if not carefully designed.

Together, these challenges remind us, even the smartest tools can leave vulnerable groups behind if inclusion isn't at the core of reform.

THE PATH AHEAD: A BALANCED VISION

⁹ For the Internet Access Report 2019:

Internet Access Report 2019, IAMAI, <https://iamai.in>.

¹⁰ Supreme Court of India Launches SUPACE AI Tool for Judges, PRESS INFO. BUREAU, GOV'T OF INDIA, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2113224>.

¹¹ Technology & Its Intrusion into the Legal World, MANUPATRA ACADEMY ,

https://www.manupatracademy.com/LegalPost/Technology_and_its_intrusion_into_the_legal_world.

¹² Explaining Caste-Based Digital Divide in India, ARXIV (June 28, 2021), <https://arxiv.org/abs/2106.15917>.

In today's rapidly evolving landscape, the Indian legal community finds itself adapting to technological change with surprising speed and creativity. Digital transformation in the legal context means reimagining every part of the legal experience for both lawyers and clients. It includes digitising service delivery, streamlining workflows and processes, enabling seamless team collaboration, and creating more responsive and accessible client engagement. Courts have already shown openness to balanced digital reform. For instance, in *Swapnil Tripathi v. Supreme Court of India (2018)*¹³, the Court upheld live streaming of proceedings, noting that "Sunlight is the best disinfectant" — a step towards transparency and public trust.

Going forward, India's judiciary must strike a balance between technological innovation with strong ethical safeguards, digital literacy drives, and localised solutions that ensure no citizen is left behind.

CONCLUSION

"Technology can transform justice delivery, but it cannot replace the human touch that justice requires."¹⁴

The future isn't about replacing judges or lawyers but empowering them. Policymakers must balance rapid digitisation with reforms: investing in training, affordable access, and strong ethical oversight. Ultimately, technology should remain a tool, not the master of justice. India's unique social landscape ensures the promise of legal technology rather than undermining fairness and human dignity. The challenge ahead is not whether to modernise, but how to do so without losing the soul of justice itself.

¹³ Swapnil Tripathi v. Supreme Court of India, (2018) 10 SCC 639 (India).

¹⁴ Justice Madan B. Lokur, *Technology Can Transform Justice Delivery, but It Cannot Replace the Human Touch That Justice Requires*, Address at the International Conference on Legal Technology (2018).