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THE ROLE OF LEGAL EDUCATION IN INDIA

-Khushi Thakur

INTRODUCTION

Legal education in India does more than increasing numbers of lawyers and judges in India. It's one of the things that decides whether a constitutional democracy actually delivers or not what it has promises. The Constitution guarantees justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity to the people, and how well those guarantees hold up in practice depends heavily on the people trained to interpret, apply, and challenge the law: lawyers, certainly, but also legislators, bureaucrats, judges, activists, and citizens who know their own rights well enough to exercise them. This piece traces how legal education in India developed, looks at what it actually does, and considers where it's still lack.

A BRIEF HISTORY

Legal education in India began under colonial rule, when law degrees were mostly theoretical and built to produce clerks and lawyers who could operate inside the British administrative and judicial system. The Government Law College in Mumbai, established in 1855, and the Law College at Calcutta were among the first institutions to offer formal legal training.

For decades after independence, legal education stuck to this same theoretical model. Which later changed in 1987, when N.R. Madhava Menon founded the National Law School of India University (NLSIU) in Bangalore. NLSIU introduced a five-year integrated LL.B. programme built around case-method teaching and research, backed by the Bar Council of India. More than twenty National Law Universities have since copied the model, shifting legal education away from pure doctrine and toward something closer to a skills-based discipline.

WHAT LEGAL EDUCATION ACTUALLY DOES

Training lawyers is the obvious function. Students learn legal reasoning, drafting, negotiation, and courtroom advocacy, skills a functioning justice system depends on. But the effects run wider than that.

Courses in constitutional law, human rights, and jurisprudence give students, and through them the public, a working understanding of fundamental rights and the rule of law, which matters for how democracy functions day to day. Law schools also run legal aid clinics and Lok Adalats, often required by the Bar Council of India, that put students in direct contact with underserved communities. It's useful training for the students, and a real, if partial, answer to India's access-to-justice problem. Law journals, moot court societies, and research centres at NLUs feed into legislative drafting and judicial reasoning, and increasingly shape debates on newer issues like data protection and AI regulation. And because legal education trains the judges, civil servants, and administrators who run the system, its quality has a knock-on effect on governance generally. (Ballakrishnen, 2009)

A CHANGING FIELD

Legal education has become more integrated courses in recent years. Combined degrees like B.A. LL.B. and B.B.A. LL.B. blend law with business, and moot court, negotiation training, and internships have become standard rather than optional, pulling the curriculum away from memorization and toward applied problem-solving.

Legal tech is the newest frontier. As courts adopt e-filing, virtual hearings, and AI-assisted research tools, law schools have started teaching technology law and digital literacy. It's an attempt to prepare students for a profession that already looks different from what it was ten years ago.

WHERE IT FALLS SHORT

The gap between elite NLUs and the roughly 1,500 other law colleges in India is wide, and many of the latter still rely on outdated, lecture-only teaching. Fees at the top NLUs are high enough to price out rural and economically weaker students, which narrows the pool the profession draws from. Student Graduated from smaller colleges or smaller towns often face difficulties at their first job as they lack practical knowledge of legal world and grounding in drafting, court

procedure, or client work. Legal education infrastructure is also concentrated in cities, leaving rural and semi-urban students with fewer good options. Due to lack of their particle knowledge in the field fresh graduates and interns or students face various problem such as low pay-scale or unpaid work, excessive work or work overtime. And while the Bar Council of India plays an important regulatory role, its curriculum approval process is often slow to keep up with new legal fields. (Kumar Malviya, 2024)

WHAT WOULD HELP

For fixing this the Government, The Bar Council of India and the University Grants Commission has taken various majors or steps such scholarships for students who can't afford the fees, by setting the pay-scale guidelines for fresher. The Bar Council of India and the University Grants Commission could push for minimum quality standards across all law colleges, not just the NLUs. More investment in clinical legal education, courses, interdisciplinary electives, and continuing education for working lawyers would also help legal training keep pace with a profession that keeps changing.

CONCLUSION

Legal education in India is more than a professional credential. It trains the people who end up running, interpreting, and defending the constitutional system. It shapes advocates, but it also shapes how much people understand and use their own rights, and how much access ordinary people have to justice. As India's legal and economic profile keeps growing, closing the gaps in access, practical training, and curriculum design isn't just good for the profession. It affects how well the rule of law actually functions on the ground.