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FUTURE OF LEGAL TECH

BY PRIYANKA KHAWALE

ABSTRACT

A fresh headline after every few months declares that artificial intelligence is about to replace lawyers but the story especially in India isn't of replacement but adaptability. In India, where the courts are infamous for their overburdened pending cases, judges outnumbered and resistance to change, the statutory notification of Digital Personal Data Protection Rules is quietly forcing the legal industry to modernize faster with help of technology.

Legal Tech is the combination of technology with legal services from digitally signing contracts to formulating systems that streamline trials. Driven by advancement of technology and generative AI, the shift in client's expectations and a surge to access justice is the unfolding reality in which the future of legal tech is no longer a far-sighted vision but a step closer to massive technological evolution.

DRAFTING TO DIRECTING

Drafting is the foundational base for any suit or criminal proceedings. Lawyers spend hours drafting boilerplate documents and understanding every minute detail, here a generative AI could save time as it has already evolved past refrained keywords. This legal tool would act as an intelligent co-pilot capable of analyzing proceedings, case laws, predicting judicial outcomes and drafting various complex agreements and contracts within seconds.

Any lawyer in this scenario would no longer be required to draft from scratch but play the role of an editor and strategist to review the generated documents. The impact of a well programmed legal tool for drafting would result in massive reduction of billable hours for routine tasks, allowing law firms to shift their focus entirely on high value advisory work.

COURTROOMS TO CONSOLES

The pending crisis of cases has not only overburdened higher courts but also the lower courts, any discussion on the future of legal tech would be incomplete without asking whether legal tech could reduce this dependency. India has already taken the first step post-pandemic by

introducing e-Courts and normalizing virtual hearing, implementation of online dispute resolution platforms and AI assisted case management systems are the next step.

Implementation of virtual hearing has enabled litigants from tier-two and tier-three cities to access justice remotely without being priced or distanced out of the system entirely. Legal aid, Pro-Bono teams and public interest litigation groups have begun collaborating with legal tech startups to make justice accessible while experimenting with AI assisted legal research programs to utilize the efficiency in searching relevant precedents without having to consume days. Legal Tech offers not just efficiency but democratization of a system which awaits technological evolution.

FRICTION POINTS

The complication often worried of and cited is the generative AI's tendency to provide hallucinated case citations. These consequences have already produced embarrassing episodes in the court-rooms, practitioners are not immune to the risk if tools are used without rigorous verification. Here, the information about any of the precedents available on public domains or even paid domains need dedicated programming to not only filter and search based on a single keyword provided but also with respect to the similarity in the facts. The role of lawyers is to inspect the cited case law with the decree.

The Bar Council of India is yet to recognize and issue a clear guidance on where AI assisted drafting ends and unauthorized practice begins. The legal vacuum and a structural gap in the current scenarios are no particular AI dedicated legislation in India. The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 and the Information Technology Act, 2000 leave major questions of liability for AI assisted advice and accountability for legal outputs unaddressed. Until this gap is recognized and addressed with appropriate solutions, legal tech in India is likely to be unexplored and restricted.

CONCLUSION

The future of legal technology is not about replacing lawyers with artificial intelligence but repositioning lawyers by appropriate use of technology. For instance, young associates who currently spend their hours preparing initial drafts, searching for precedents and organizing relevant documents related to the proceedings fear being replaced by a well programmed AI legal tool which efficiently takes only a few minutes for the same work. But implemented appropriately, AI legal tools can absorb the repetitive groundwork helping them save time and engage with strategic and analytical thinking of the matter. The young associate who once spent days compiling precedent can spend that same day refining the argument itself. This particular small step would project as a work-saving strategy rather than a threat to the advocacy. The real story in India is not about a profession being automated away, but one learning to redirect its most valuable resource, time, toward the work that actually requires a lawyer.