

**PLACE OF NLUS IN INDIA'S LEGAL EDUCATION
ECOSYSTEM**

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ABSTRACT

There comes a time in the life of an individual or a community, where one must pause, introspect, and evaluate as to whether it is moving in the right direction. Times are not static for 'everything changes except the rule of change'. The ecosystem of Indian legal education is no exception to change and a great amount of water has flown down in the rivers of India, since the experiment of National Law School system commenced. The contemporary scene of India's legal education ecosystem is far from satisfactory and the challenges that we face today are immense to say the least. This article seeks to address where we stand today, what has been achieved over the last seven to eight decades, and the direction in which legal education is headed – or should be heading.

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I. INTRODUCTION AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF LEGAL EDUCATION IN INDIA

Since the mid-20th century, when India gained independence and the opportunity to shape its destiny, the legal education arena went through a series of changes, from a time when no formal education was required to become a lawyer, to a mandatory two-year course, then a three-year course, and finally to the current five-year system.¹ At the time of independence, India had no structured legal education system in place, except a few university departments offering law courses. This was despite the fact that the legal community contributed tremendously to the freedom struggle and to the evolution of national consciousness. Many of the foremost leaders were eminent lawyers, including persons like Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and Sardar Patel. Yet there are no traces of any inclination demonstrated by them to prioritize the development of legal education.²

There may be two primary reasons for such oversight. First, India was economically underdeveloped struggling to be pulled out of its economic quagmire and therefore leading to the emphasis on science and technological education. Secondly, most of the lawyers at the time were functioning in a common law environment where advocacy was more a

¹ V. Vijaykumar, *Legal Education in India and The National Law School Experiment - Achievements and Challenges*, in LEGAL EDUCATION IN INDIA: ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF PROFESSOR RANBIR SINGH 143, 143-151 (Lokendra Malik & Manish Arora eds., Universal Law Publishing 2014).

² Lovely Dasgupta, *Reforming Indian Legal Education: Linking Research and Teaching*, 59 (3) J. OF LEGAL EDUC. 432, 432-449 (Feb. 2010).

matter of practicing before courts rather than an intellectual pursuit in a structured university environment.³

II. COMMISSIONS, COMMITTEES AND THE BIRTH OF NATIONAL LAW SCHOOLS SYSTEM

Over time various commissions and committees examined the problems afflicting the legal education ecosystem and proposed their recommendations for improvements. The Radhakrishnan Commission, constituted in 1948, recommended for a strong foundation of pre-law degree in arts or science which enable interdisciplinary study fostering a proper understanding of social and economic problems of cultural issues. The Commission noted the adverse effects of English as the medium in general education and laid a special emphasis on the linguistic aspect of legal education, recommending that legal education should be in bilingual mode. The objective was to develop federal and state languages which could become a vehicle for expression of local sentiments giving an impetus to quality research and scholarly depth.⁴ Accordingly, it suggested that the medium of instructions be gradually transitioned to regional languages.⁵

A mention of the Justice Gajendragadkar Committee of 1964 is essential in the context of the evolving legal education ecosystem in India.

³ RANBIR SINGH & JEET SINGH MANN, REFORMS IN LEGAL EDUCATION & RESEARCH (Mohan Law House 2020).

⁴ MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, THE REPORT OF THE UNIVERSITY EDUCATION COMMISSION (Government of India Dec. 1948 – Aug. 1949).

⁵ *Dr. Radhakrishnan Commission Report on Higher Education*, 2 NMIMS J. OF ECON. AND PUB. POL'Y (Jan. 2017), <https://epp-journal.nmims.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/january/dr-radhakrishnan-commission-report-on-higher-education.pdf>.

In 1963, the Delhi University appointed a Committee headed by the then Chief Justice of India to study the problem of reorganisation of legal education. The Committee submitted its Report, in 1964, recommending the establishment of a Council for Legal Education and three or four model National Law Schools that could attract dedicated and eminent law teachers. These institutions may serve as centres for continuous experimentation in new methods of legal education⁶. Justice Gajendragadkar reiterated that the teaching of law must progress through experimentation and that the trial-and-error method should be adopted in National Law Schools without hindrance or impediment. He emphasized that such an approach will ultimately serve the purpose of bringing about a new pattern of legal education.⁷

The understanding of Justice Gajendragadkar was probably to develop a few role models of legal education that could be emulated by other institutions across the country. The National Law School experiment that started in late 1980s with the establishment of National Law School of India University in Bengaluru (“**NLSIU**”) followed by several other law schools, was a planned effort to develop role models in legal education. Nobody can deny that the establishment of these law schools in the country has been a breakthrough in legal education giving a new direction to the legal education field. One might recall that until the 1990s, legal education was a last resort for most students. Those who could not get admission

⁶ REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE FOR RE-ORGANISATION OF LEGAL EDUCATION IN THE UNIVERSITY OF Delhi, (University of Delhi 1964).

⁷ P. K. Tripathi, *In the Quest for Better Legal Education*, 10(3) JOURNAL OF THE INDIAN LAW INSTITUTE 469, 469-491 (July – Sept. 1968).

anywhere else would turn to law. Contrarily, today, legal education is attracting the best minds across the country and there are cases where students have left medical education to opt for legal education. This kind of attraction towards legal education has been made possible only due to success of the law school experiment in India.

III. CHALLENGES IN THE CURRENT LEGAL EDUCATION ECOSYSTEM

Despite the definite breakthroughs in legal education due to the National Law Schools experiment, today, we are facing several challenges within the system. But one thing is certain - if there is any hope for developing law and legal education, law schools must play a dominant role – not only in terms of conducting new experiments in imparting legal education and evolving teaching pedagogies, but also in giving a new shape to legal education in the post-2020 era.

It is in this context, the author would like to discuss about the challenges that we face within the law school systems and explore ways to overcome them. The goal is for law schools not only to pioneer new experiments but also to provide support to less-equipped legal education centers, thereby shaping the national legal education system and contributing to the development of new types of legal education centers.

In this context it would be important to take note of the National Education Policy, 2020 (“**NEP, 2020**”), which talks about, “*Stand-alone institutions to develop into multidisciplinary institutions in next 10 to 15 years*”.⁸

⁸ MINISTRY OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT, NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020 (Government of India 2020) (“**NEP, 2020**”).

Through this, we shall see research universities and teaching colleges emerging all over the country. As the policy suggests, law and legal learning will have to find ways and means to develop their own model institutions in line with NEP directions. We might delay this for a while, but we must admit that we will have to move towards multidisciplinary teaching institutions, keeping law as the focus of our teaching-learning process. The author's view is that this will help in moulding legal education for the betterment of legal processes and serve the justice delivery system as well.

It is in this context that that the author sees the role of National Law Universities (“**NLU's**”) in India's legal education ecosystem. To appreciate the role that NLU's can play, we need to first understand the current ecosystem of legal education in India. If we take a bird's-eye view of centres of legal learning in our country at the moment, there are over 170 government universities with law departments, and close to 250 private universities with centres of legal education. Additionally, there are around 400 government sector law colleges affiliated to various universities and close to 950 colleges in the private sector. And finally, there are 27 NLU's.

In this scenario, where should we look for most of the experimentation needed to develop new models of legal education? Without delving into the details of the competencies and resources available at government university law departments, private university law departments, government law colleges and private law colleges, the author believes that only NLU's in the country are in a position to provide guidance and offer the necessary handholding support to lesser-equipped centres of legal education.

But for that purpose, we need to first sort out our own problems and find solutions before we can aspire to become pioneers or beacons of experimentation in legal education and develop new models of legal institutions. There cannot be an exhaustive list of problems and their corresponding solutions, but the author shall attempt to highlight some of the more acute problems that need our attention. The discussion that follows does not make a claim of panacea for the challenges facing legal education. Rather it is an effort identify some areas of concern where effective work by the law school system in the country could help in shaping a better legal education ecosystem across India.

An intensely contentious issue in legal education has been the medium of instruction, which has been a topic of debate in India for a very long time. Interestingly, the Radhakrishnan Commission (1948) deliberated on this subject, and one of its key recommendations was that legal studies should be conducted in a bilingual mode.⁹ The Commission's understanding was that a bilingual approach to legal education would gradually enable the introduction of regional languages to the High Court level. It reasoned that education in regional languages would provide a powerful stimulus to research, the expansion of knowledge, and the enrichment of legal literature and culture.¹⁰

⁹ *Dr. Radhakrishnan Commission Report on Higher Education*, 2 NMIMS J. OF ECON. AND PUB. POL'Y (Jan. 2017), <https://epp-journal.nmims.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/january/dr-radhakrishnan-commission-report-on-higher-education.pdf>.

¹⁰ *Id.*

The Indian Law Commission of 1958-59 also suggested that legal education be conducted in regional languages.¹¹ However, due to the lack of available materials on the subject, it preferred to postpone this for 25 to 30 years.¹² Later commissions and committee reports did not raise the question of language until the NEP, 2020, which specifically addressed multilingual efforts in the education system including legal education. It may be noted that there are valid arguments on both sides. While globalisation and internationalisation of education, access to global resources and constant interaction with the international community – one of the objectives of NEP, 2020 – require proficiency in English language, the counter-arguments are equally strong. The prevalence and continuance of English language as the medium of instructions acts as a major barrier for many students, particularly those from rural and non-English speaking backgrounds. Such students face enormous difficulties in understanding and communicating in English, which in many cases hinders their ability to pursue legal education effectively.

Ultimately, the choice of the medium of instruction in legal education should be guided by the principles of accessibility, inclusivity, and academic excellence. A balanced approach, which takes into account the diverse needs and contexts of students can help resolve the controversy surrounding the medium of instruction. In this context, we have the recommendations of the NEP, 2020, which seek to promote

¹¹ LAW COMMISSION OF INDIA, REPORT NO. 14: 1 REFORMS OF JUDICIAL ADMINISTRATION (1958).

¹² JK Bhavnani, *Legal Education in India*, 4(2) J. OF THE INDIAN L. INST. 167, 167-190 (Apr. – June, 1962).

multilingualism and make Indian languages more relevant and vibrant. Fostering Indian languages, art and culture as well as promoting Indian languages in teaching learning process is one of the policy's key focus areas.¹³

Apart from this a few more important recommendations that need to be noted include an emphasis on high-quality programs and degrees in translation and interpretation, mainstreaming of Sanskrit, its integration into educational programs, the promotion of institutions dedicated to classical languages and the provision of scholarships for language courses. These will be the thrust areas of NEP, 2020.

Speaking from the perspective of a law student, what the author understands is that – whether we like it or not – if the NEP, 2020's thrust on multilingualism is any indicator, the use of Indian languages is going to increase not only in education process but also in litigation and other areas of justice administration. The Hon'ble Supreme Court of India has already launched the SUVAS Program which enables users to read Supreme Court judgements in any Indian language.¹⁴ On 13th July, 2024, the then Chief Justice of India, Justice D. Y. Chandrachud observed that the use of Indian

¹³ *Dr. Radhakrishnan Commission Report on Higher Education*, 2 NMIMS J. OF ECON. AND PUB. POL'Y (Jan. 2017), <https://epp-journal.nmims.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/january/dr-radhakrishnan-commission-report-on-higher-education.pdf>.

¹⁴ *Action Plan for Simple, Accessible, Affordable and Speedy Justice*, MINISTRY OF LAW AND JUSTICE (Aug. 10, 2023), <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1947490>.

languages in court proceedings is something that the higher courts intend to promote.¹⁵ How NLU's will respond to this is an open question.

It is worth noting that some private universities offering legal courses, have already introduced a range of language courses as part of their law programs. However, no National Law University has worked on the idea, to the best of the author's knowledge. NLSIU's experiment in offering liberal courses is the only initiative that comes to mind.

The observations of the Radhakrishnan Commission (1948) might sound prophetic today, which suggested, as we have noted earlier that legal education should be bilingual and that Indian languages need to be promoted in the legal learning process. The Commission emphasized that education in regional languages would provide a powerful stimulus to research, the expansion of knowledge and the enrichment of literature and culture.¹⁶ It is also important to note that although Chapter 20 of NEP, 2020, exempts legal education from the purview the policy – leaving its regulation to the professional body, i.e., the Bar Council of India (“BCI”) – the BCI's guidelines primarily mandate English as the medium of instruction and in case where the medium of instructions is any other

¹⁵ Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, Convocation Address, Dr. Ram Manohar Lohiya National Law University, Lucknow (Jul. 13, 2014).

¹⁶ *Dr. Radhakrishnan Commission Report on Higher Education*, 2 NMIMS J. OF ECON. AND PUB. POL'Y (Jan. 2017), <https://epp-journal.nmims.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/january/dr-radhakrishnan-commission-report-on-higher-education.pdf>.

language, there must be at least two mandatory English Language papers in the curriculum.¹⁷

IV. PEDAGOGY, EVALUATION AND THE FUTURE OF LEGAL EDUCATION

The pedagogy of legal learning has been a matter of concern throughout the post-independence phase, particularly there has been consistent and continuing emphasis on clinical legal education. The introduction of Five-year Law courses followed by the law school experiment has been characterised by an emphasis on clinical legal courses. Part IV of the Bar Council of India (Education) Rules, 2008, specifically mandates the teaching of at least four clinical courses.¹⁸ As professional legal education becomes increasingly experiential and clinical, and as societal and technological changes accelerate, resulting in a ‘future shock’ paradigm, law schools need to equip students to take on diverse roles in society across variety of positions.¹⁹

The range and scope of legal careers in contemporary India continue to expand, encompassing roles such as policy makers, administrators, lawyers, law teachers, judges, entrepreneurs and so on. As society becomes increasingly technical and artificial intelligence (“AI”) reshapes industries, legal professionals face a growing array of complex and

¹⁷ Part-IV, *Rules of Legal Education*, 2008, BAR COUNCIL OF INDIA <https://www.barcouncilofindia.org/info/bar-counci-bceugp>.

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ N. R. Madhava Menon, *Clinical Legal Education: Concepts and Concerns*, in A HANDBOOK ON CLINICAL LEGAL EDUCATION (N. R. Madhava Menon ed., Eastern Book Company 1998).

evolving responsibilities. The question of legal pedagogy in this context, therefore, assumes crucial importance.

In this context, the NEP, 2020, emphasises the need for pedagogical transformation in view of a rapidly changing employment landscape and globalised ecosystem.²⁰ The Policy underscores that it is no longer sufficient for students to merely learn; rather they must develop the ability to learn *how to learn*. In this context, it is noteworthy that the educational process has been moving towards a less content-based and more learning-based approach that prioritises critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, multidisciplinary, innovation, and adaptability. The Policy therefore mandates that the “*educational process must be made more experiential, holistic, integrated, inquiry driven, discovery oriented, learner centred, discussion based, flexible and of course enjoyable*”.²¹

Law school education has certainly acted as a catalyst in making the existing system of legal education more clinical and experiential by experimenting with processes like moot court competitions, project-based learning, and continuous evaluation thereby transforming legal education into a more well-rounded, useful and fulfilling process for the learner. Prior to the National Law Schools experiment in this country, legal education, like any other discipline was primarily focused more on rote learning with annual or semester exams of a purely subjective nature, wherein the students were expected to demonstrate their memorization skills. One of

²⁰ NEP, 2020, *supra* note 8.

²¹ N.L. Mitra & Manoj Kumar Sinha, *National Education Policy 2020 and Challenges to the Bar Council of India*, 10(1) ASIAN J. OF LEGAL EDUC. 7, 7-22 (Dec. 12, 2022).

the most distinct achievements of law school education in India has been its ability to shift legal education towards a more clinical and experiential. It may be reasonably asserted that the law school systems have the potential to further refine and innovate legal pedagogy, serving as models to be emulated by the centres of legal learning in rest of the country to improve the overall legal education ecosystem.

Another dimension of legal pedagogy is related to the content of the legal learning process. It goes almost without saying that law and the legal discipline is one of those disciplines, which must be highly responsive and agile to social needs and changing circumstances. Law plays a crucial role in social mechanism. A basic knowledge of law is becoming increasingly necessary for individuals engaged in various professions, trade and industry. In fact, even to lead a healthy life as a common citizen, one needs to have a fair understanding of law.

If one looks at the legal curriculum before the law school experiment in India, one might be tempted to conclude that it was very narrow and focused solely on core legal subjects.²² However, in the post National Law Schools experiment era, legal education has witnessed significant transformation. Apart from the traditional learning areas, numerous interdisciplinary fields have been integrated into legal education. Areas such as law and technology, market process related regulatory matters, insurance, banking, intellectual property rights, public policy

²² Jane E. Schukoske, *Legal Education Reform in India: Dialogue Among Indian Law Teacher*, 1(1) *Jindal Glob. L. Rev.* 251, 251-279 (Sept. 1, 2009), <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1452888>.

studies, cyber technology and law, media and law, sports law and several such areas have emerged as specialized domains. These elements enhance the practical utility of legal education, making interdisciplinary learning more relevant to contemporary challenges.

The NEP, 2020, has put a special emphasis on interdisciplinarity, highlighting the need for a curriculum that includes basic arts, crafts, humanities, games, sports and fitness, languages, literature, culture and values in addition to science and mathematics, to develop all aspects and capabilities of learners.²³ The Policy highlights that education must build character enable learners to be ethical, rational, compassionate and caring while at the same time preparing them for gainful employment. This is especially relevant to the legal education process where empathy and compassion play a crucial role in the life of a legal professional, alongside being ethical and rational in their professional practice. Such content-based experiments carried out in legal education by law school systems serve as models that could be and should be emulated by the other centres of legal education. This would further justify the existence of law schools as pioneers and mentors for the broader legal education ecosystem in the country.

Evaluation is one of the elements that have been a distinguishing factor in the success of the National Law Schools experiment.²⁴ Evaluation plays an important part in the teaching - learning process, as it involves testing and measurement of the student's learning, accomplishments,

²³ NEP, 2020, *supra* note 8.

²⁴ See HANDBOOK FOR STUDENTS, 2020-21 (NLU Delhi 2020).

performance, and ongoing education. It helps students learn and develop competencies and determines overall efficacy of the teaching-learning system. Thus, it not only assesses how far the student has progressed towards the intended goal, but also the effectiveness of the learning experience, methodologies and materials used for achieving those goals. In this way, the educational evaluation process plays a formative role in the educational endeavour of the teaching-learning community. However, it could also be one-dimensional, focusing only on assessing students' performance at the end of learning period and certifying the minimum level of learning achieved by the students. This is generally known as the 'summative evaluation' and is an assessment of student's accomplishment at the end of a course.

Evaluation in centres of legal education across the country has primarily been summative in character, relying on written examinations in a subjective and descriptive mode, which test mere memory retention and reproduction of the material. The overall understanding of the student in terms of critical thinking and problem solving is barely tested. This was sought to be changed in the National Law Schools experiment by way of continuous and formative evaluation processes, wherein the student is expected to not only react to situations on the basis of his/her learning but researching and coming up with novel solutions. This led to the introduction of clinical learning, moot court competitions, project report writing, client counselling sessions and so on. This undoubtedly changed the dynamic of legal learning process and centres of legal learning across

the country have attempted to emulate National Law School systems' experiment, though in their own unique ways.

However, the evaluation system within law schools is now under scrutiny, as existing methods are becoming outdated in the face of new technology and evolving learning paradigms. For example, project report writing requires little to no intellectual exercise in the age of AI tools like ChatGPT and while moot court competitions emphasise presentation aesthetics, they only replicate a small part of court's working, i.e. final argument in higher courts.

The process of lawyering involves far more than just argumentation, and there is growing awareness that the aesthetics of presentation in moot court competitions does not expose a student to the intricacies of a lawyer's work.²⁵ The task cut out for the law school systems therefore, is to figure out and experiment new methodologies of evaluation and assessment that not only test the real potential of the student but also enhance learning, improve curriculum design and promote innovation and best practices which can then be adopted by other centres of legal learning.²⁶

The NEP, 2020, captures this challenge succinctly by emphasizing the need for assessment in our educational set up to shift away from a summative approach that primarily tests rote memorization skills to one that is regular, formative, and competency-based, promotes learning and

²⁵ Amit Dhall, *Legal Education in India: The Emerging Challenges and Prospects*, 6(1) DLR (2014).

²⁶ Vijendra Kumar, *Emergence of National Law Universities and Legal Education in India: Learning through Experiments*, 3(1) CONTEMPORARY L. REV. 13, 13-39 (2019).

development for our students, and tests higher-order skills, such as analysis, critical thinking, and conceptual clarity. Herein lies the crucial role of National Law Schools in designing, experimenting and evolving assessment processes, that help student community in better developing their analytical and critical thinking.

V. RESEARCH AND MULTIDISCIPLINARY LEARNING IN LEGAL EDUCATION

Research is another critical area which requires immediate attention. We cannot afford to forget that world's best teaching and learning processes thrive in universities with a strong culture of research and knowledge creation. Research, in general, and social science and legal research in particular, have been neglected areas in India. This is evidence from the fact that India spends only approximately 0.69% of its GDP on research compared to around 4% in countries like the United States and Israel where most of this funding is allocated to natural science research.²⁷ As a result, research takes a back seat in all kinds of educational planning and even at institutional planning process.

The tradition of think tanks in India has also been underwhelming. It is only during the last one and a half decades that we have seen the emergence of private-sector think tanks alongside the transformation of the erstwhile planning commission into NITI Aayog, which stands for National

²⁷ Dr Amit Kapoor & Neeraj Sinha, *India Innovation Index 2021*, INSTITUTE FOR COMPETITIVENESS & NITI AAYOG, https://www.niti.gov.in/sites/default/files/2022-07/India-Innovation-Index-2021-Web-Version_21_7_22.pdf.

Institute for Transforming India and serves as a think tank of the central government.²⁸ When it comes to legal research, there is lack of substantive material that demonstrates the research potential of our centres of legal education. One might recall that when the first few law schools like NLSIU and NALSAR were established, there was a strong expectation that these institutions would evolve into policy research hubs.

While the primary strength of National Law School systems has been their undergraduate programs, they have gradually introduced Master's²⁹ and PhD programs. However, these programs have not made a significant impact over the years. In fact, after the duration of LL.M. course was reduced to one year by UGC, the rigour of the Master's program, apparently, has disappeared. PhD programs too, have not made much headway.

That said, National Law Schools possess a wealth of resources – both online and offline materials – that could be extremely useful for research process. Yet, despite these resources, PhD scholars in these institutions have not contributed anything which could be considered outstanding by any objective measure. Unfortunately, after gaining admissions in PhD courses³⁰, many students immerse themselves in preparation for competitive examinations, mostly judicial services

²⁸ *Objectives and Features*, NITI AAYOG, <https://www.niti.gov.in/objectives-and-features>.

²⁹ See *Postgraduate-Study-In-Law*, NALSAR UNIVERSITY OF LAW, <https://nalsar.ac.in/postgraduate-study-law>.

³⁰ See *Doctoral Programme*, NLU JODHPUR, <https://nlujodhpur.ac.in/university/doctoral-program#:~:text=National%20Law%20University%20Jodhpur%20offers,interdisciplinary%20domain%20of%20legal%20research>.

examinations, rather than focusing on their research commitments. It is only towards the far end of their PhD programs that they realise the need to complete their theses and consequently they resort to compiling three hundred-plus pages on generic topics to fulfil the formal requirements. Despite the various quality control mechanisms introduced by the UGC, significant progress in PhD research remains elusive.³¹

Law schools need to rethink their priorities and place greater emphasis on research, which could serve as a powerful lever to enhance the overall learning experience of law school systems. There is no dearth of materials these days, either online or offline, as far as law school systems are concerned. The only thing truly needed is a strong commitment to usher in a new era of rigorous legal research.

Law school systems now exist in almost every state now, barring a few exceptions, they have the potential to lead the research movement. The NEP, 2020, envisions catalysing quality research through the establishment of the National Research Foundation (“**NRF**”) for the purpose of enabling a stronger culture of research. The NRF will provide a reliable, merit-based and equitable peer-reviewed research funding, helping foster a culture of research in the country through suitable incentives and recognition. Additionally, the NRF will undertake major initiatives to seed and develop research capabilities at State Universities and other public institutions where research capability is currently lacking.

³¹ Sidharth Chauhan, *Crisis in legal studies in India*, FRONTLINE MAGAZINE, THE HINDU (Mar. 13-27, 2020), <https://frontline.thehindu.com/thenation/education/article31039043.ece?homepage=true>.

The NRF will competitively fund research in all disciplines. Successful research will be recognized, and where relevant, implemented through collaborations with governmental agencies as well as with industry and private/philanthropic organizations. Existing research bodies, like the Department of Science and Technology, Department of Energy, Department of Biotechnology, Indian Council of Agricultural Research and Indian Council of Medical Research etc., will continue to fund research wherever necessary in their respective domains. However, NRF will work to develop synergies among these institutions to help evolve a strong research culture in the country. From the perspective of legal research, National Law Schools represent the only light at the end of the tunnel to aid in evolving research culture in the legal education arena across the country.

VI. THE FUTURE OF LEGAL EDUCATION IN INDIA

The National Law School experiment began in the late 1980s and flourished in second decade of the 21st century. Today, 27 law schools operate across the country that follow a similar structural format, though each institution offers its own specialized courses and curricula. The hallmark of these law schools has been their five-year integrated undergraduate program. Over the past three and a half decades, the primary experiments in legal education are courses like, B.A. LL.B., B.B.A. LL.B., B. Com LL. B., and B.Sc. LL.B along with micro-specializations, especially

in corporate law where law school graduates have made their presence felt.³² Beyond this, however, little innovation has taken place in terms of new experiments.

The NEP, 2020, while excluding law and medical education from its purview, does mandate that ‘standalone institutions would develop into multidisciplinary teaching institutions’. The Policy envisions two types of institutions in the future –teaching-focused universities and research-focused universities. Meanwhile, the traditional affiliation system is likely to be phased out by 2035. This raises the question of whether law schools should expand into multidisciplinary institutions?

So far, the only major diversification attempted by the law school systems is the introduction of the three-year LL.B. courses, which strictly speaking do not amount to true multidisciplinary system of teaching. However, this year, NLSIU Bengaluru has commenced an ambitious experiment aimed at transforming into a multidisciplinary university. It has introduced a BA program that shares a common core curriculum with its B.A., LL.B. students while offering specialisations in History, Sociology and Anthropology, Politics, Economics. Additionally, it provides students with the opportunity to pursue major-minor or double-major tracks and courses in Indian languages, AI and machine learning, film making, business consulting, digital journalism, creative writing, entrepreneurship, policy advocacy and analysis.

³² D. Y. Chandrachud, *The Future of the Indian Legal Profession*, 4(2) THE PRACTICE (2018), <https://theppractice.law.harvard.edu/article/future-indian-legal-profession/>.

The aim is to reposition the B.A. as a highly aspirational degree, accessible through a public institution. It is not a replication of the existing B.A. programs already offered across the country rather the idea is to design programs which are responsive to the contemporary needs, skill-sets and are more professionally-oriented with the demands of the 21st century industry demands.³³ However, this model also present challenges – can a law-focused institution successfully integrate multidisciplinary courses without diluting its core identity as a legal institution? NLSIU is also working on the idea of further introducing courses on philosophy, literature, arts and culture.³⁴ This seems to be a bold experiment, but whether the model would be replicable elsewhere is a moot question.

The NEP, 2020, provides a better perspective to this conundrum. In view of the problems faced and requirements of the issues – such as quality education and healthcare, clean drinking water and sanitation, better air quality, energy and infrastructure – we do not need just the application of top-notch scientific and technological efforts, but also a deeper understanding of the social sciences and humanities and variety of socio-cultural and environmental dimensions of our country. This requires high quality research infrastructure to be developed with the intention to adapt and adopt all kinds of measures and methods, including importing relevant research from abroad in order to address our challenges at the point of

³³ Swethaa Ballakrishnen, *Where Did We Come From? Where Do We Do? An Enquiry into the Students and Systems of Legal Education in India*, 7(2) J. OF COMMONW. L. AND LEGAL EDUC. 133, 133-154 (Jul. 23, 2010).

³⁴ Upasana Dasgupta, *The Paradox of Elite Law Schools in India – A comparison with Canadian Legal Education*, ÉTUDES 147, 147-164 (Dec. 2019).

incidence. Many of these challenges become more complex when addressed using western research models. Therefore, interdisciplinary research across fields along with innovations in science and social sciences are extremely important for the progress and enhancement of our own system.

The question of whether the NLSIU, Bengaluru model of interdisciplinary learning and research would be able to develop that kind of an interdisciplinary research infrastructure is once again a moot question. But one thing can be stated safely that if we intend to move towards socially relevant research, such experiments need to be undertaken. Rather than simply replicating the NLSIU, Bengaluru model, each law school could develop its own model of interdisciplinary learning and research, maintaining a legal learning centred environment. This, in the author's opinion can significantly contribute to developments in the movement towards a more socially relevant learning and research, creating a model of legal learning which can be emulated by rest of the centres of legal education.

It is noteworthy that some of the most groundbreaking research worldwide has happened in multidisciplinary university settings. If Indian law school systems aspire to lead legal education they need to develop into multidisciplinary research institutions. This obviously would require lot of experimentation and the direction taken would depend upon the appetite for risk-taking and innovation that law school systems can afford in their individual capacities.