

Professor (Dr.) Jai S. Singh & Dr. Sangeeta Taak, *Legal Education in India in the Contemporary Era*, 11(1) NLUJ LR 297 (2025)

**LEGAL EDUCATION IN INDIA IN THE CONTEMPORARY
ERA**

~ Professor (Dr.) Jai S. Singh & Dr. Sangeeta Taak*

ABSTRACT

Education in ancient India was not confined to academic institutions but was instead part of a broader system of religious, ethical, and philosophical teachings. The idea of true learning entailed a dynamic equation between knowledge, experience and skill. There's been a paradigm shift in the structure of learning in every discipline in modern societies, more so in legal education, from being deeply integrated with the society's moral and spiritual life, with laws often reflecting the principles of dharma (righteousness) and justice, to being embedded in preparing lawyers to take on as social engineers, to conduct legal research, collect comprehensive legal data, imbibe oratory skills and possess information and knowledge of both national and international developments. Considering the innumerable dimensions of legal studies, it becomes imperative for Undergraduate and Post Graduate courses to introduce this interdisciplinary approach. This paper aims to look at the shifting paradigms of legal education in India from the ancient to the contemporary era. The paper has also explained the role of the Bar Council of India and Universities in imparting legal education in India. It aims to explore the challenges and subsequent solutions it faces in

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the era of globalisation. The paper has used doctrinal methods and secondary sources like books, journals, reports and Supreme Court Judgments. Herein, Part I of the paper will introduce the topic providing the historical context, setting the foundation for the analysis. Part II outlines the aims and objectives of legal education, highlighting its role in fostering socially conscious professionals and preparing students for modern challenges. Part III discusses the influence of globalisation, emphasizing the need for lawyers to adapt to international legal systems and trends. Part IV discusses legal education in ancient India, focusing on the Gurukul system, oral traditions, and the influence of texts such as the Vedas and Smritis. Part V explores the contemporary era, emphasizing the integration of technology, interdisciplinary approaches, and innovative tools such as moot courts and AI-driven research. Part VI examines the role of the Bar Council of India in regulating and improving legal education. Part VII identifies challenges like outdated curricula, lack of access, and insufficient practical training. Part VIII proposes reforms, including bridging theoretical-practical gaps, regional language inclusion, and fostering research innovation. Finally, Part IX concludes with recommendations for building an inclusive, globally competitive legal education system.

Key Words: *Legal Education, Directive Principles, Interdisciplinary Approach*

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I. INTRODUCTION

“The whole purpose of education is to turn mirrors into windows.”

~ Sydney J. Harris

Legal education in “ancient India was deeply rooted in the traditions of knowledge, wisdom, and justice, which were passed down orally and through religious texts, and later codified into written laws. The structure of legal education was influenced by religious, philosophical, and social principles, with the role of law primarily being intertwined with morality and duty”.¹ With the advent of e-learning, consultation and practicing, comprehending and interpreting law has become easier and more systematic. There has been a considerable shift from the pre-digital to the digital era, leveraging technological advancement in the legal arena as well. Advanced technology has not only made easier the consultation of legal help but also has made legal education swift and available at a click of a mouse through both on campus and online programs.

II. AIMS AND OBJECTIVE OF LEGAL EDUCATION

The purpose of legal education extends beyond merely producing lawyers; it aims to instil a profound sense of service to society. Its primary objective should be to prepare students to navigate the challenges of the modern era effectively. Legal education must equip students with the skills to address individual clients’ issues by understanding the law comprehensively and applying it to resolve disputes through mediation,

¹ Arun Krishnan, Nithin Ramakrishnan, *Justice as an Inter-Generational Idea: Some Foundational Perspectives from Indian Philosophy*, 61(1) J. INDIAN L. INST. (2019), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27097348>.

arbitration, and other alternative dispute-resolution mechanisms. As aptly stated, “*Legal education should aim at furnishing skills and competence, for the creation and maintenance of a just society.*”² Moreover, the foundation of every society lies in the rule of law, which not only cultivates law-abiding citizens but also nurtures future lawyers, academics, and judges. In the Indian context, legal education signifies the training which the lawyers undergo before entering the profession. Historically, teachings on ‘Dharma and Nyaya’ were imparted to kings and princes in ancient times. During the Mughal era, the concept of legal representation began to take shape. Remarkably, many of India’s freedom fighters had legal backgrounds, underscoring the existence of legal education even before independence. However, its prominence grew significantly in the post-independence period. This paper delves deeper into the factors shaping the landscape of legal education in India.

III. GLOBALISATION AND LEGAL EDUCATION IN INDIA

Globalisation in legal education refers to “*the process of expanding and integrating legal systems, practices, and academic approaches across borders. It involves the influence of global trends, technological advancements, and international norms on how law is taught, practiced, and understood worldwide*”, involving legal professionals to possess knowledge of various legal systems, international law, and the global context in which legal issues arise.

At its core, globalisation in legal education is about equipping future lawyers to navigate a rapidly evolving world. However,

² Asha Rani, *Education Need of Society*, 2(6) INT’L J. OF ADVANCE RESEARCH, IDEAS AND INNOVATIONS IN TECHNOLOGY 71 (2016).

globalisation presents new challenges to the legal profession. It is the process by which a local condition or entity transcends geographical boundaries, gaining global relevance while relegating competing social conditions or entities to localized significance. As a result, the study of law can no longer be confined within the territorial boundaries of national legal systems.

To address this paradigm shift, there is a pressing need to broaden the scope of general jurisprudence by incorporating more precise and globally relevant concepts, such as group dynamics, dispute resolution, institutional frameworks, processes, functions, decisions, regulations, efficiency, and effectiveness. These terminologies can enhance cross-cultural understanding within the legal field. To meet the challenges posed by globalisation, lawyers must possess a vision for addressing emerging problems, a commitment to serving justice, and the capacity to develop innovative tools and techniques tailored to the demands of a changing world.

Unfortunately, the current state of legal education falls short of these requirements, necessitating an urgent and comprehensive effort to evaluate past attempts and outline a forward-looking strategy. A well-functioning legal system is the cornerstone of a free and fair society. Such a system not only fulfils the needs of the people but also upholds the 'rule of law,' ensuring that all individuals are subject to the same legal framework.

“The purpose of legal education is not only to teach law but to develop in the student the ability to apply legal principles to real-life situations. It is through this that law becomes the tool for social reform.”

~ Dr. S. Radhakrishnan (Former President of India and Scholar)

In India, the Bar Council of India (“**BCI**”) oversees the legal profession and legal education. Indian legal frameworks, including the Constitution, are inherently flexible, reflecting the dynamic needs of a progressive society. Laws are continuously adapted to align with the evolving aspirations of the nation. For a legal system to succeed, it must uphold the ‘rule of law,’ which requires qualified and skilled professionals. Lawyers and judges play a crucial role, particularly in interpreting laws to meet societal needs. Therefore, there is an urgent need to strengthen the capabilities of future lawyers and align legal education with global standards.

The establishment of National Law Universities represents a significant institutional vision aimed at modernizing legal education in India. These institutions are enabling Indian students to compete on a global stage, fostering a legal education system that keeps pace with international trends. Over the years, several initiatives have been introduced to improve legal education. For instance, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has emphasized the need to integrate new subjects into the curriculum, make mediation a compulsory subject,

enhance student exchange programs, and increase the representation of women in legal education.³

The regulatory framework for legal education in India is primarily managed by the University Grants Commission (“UGC”) and the BCI. However, the quality of legal education has long been a matter of concern. Additionally, issues such as inadequate infrastructure, a shortage of qualified faculty, and subpar teaching methods are cited as persisting major problems.⁴

IV. LEGAL EDUCATION IN ANCIENT INDIA

Here are some key features of legal education in ancient India that included the role of religions and Vedic education, the Gurukul system, the influence of Jainism, Buddhism etc. For example, the role of religion was having special importance like the Vedas and Dharm Shastras were used connected with the education. However, the most famous was the Manusmriti, though legal education was also based on other Smritis, like the Yajnavalkya Smriti and the Narada Smriti, which outlined ethical and legal codes for different stages of life, social duties, and justice.⁵

The Gurukuls were popular in the ancient India, whereas Lord Rama has also taken the education through the Gurukul. These Gurukul

³ *Need to equip our youth with skills in emerging technologies: Prime Minister*, THE HINDU (Dec. 26, 2024), www.thehindu.com/news/national/need-to-equip-our-youth-with-skills-in-emerging-technologies-pm/article69029722.ece.

⁴ Global Report on Teachers: What you need to know, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/global-report-teachers-what-you-need-know>.

⁵ Justice Markandeya Katju, Judge, Supreme Court of India, ANCIENT INDIAN JURISPRUDENCE Speech delivered on Nov. 27, 2020 at Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi.

used to give education to their students under the Guru. Who used to be considered as Mentor. Whereas, “*the teachings of the Vedas and the Dharma Shastras formed the core curriculum in legal education. This knowledge was delivered orally, with students expected to memorize and internalize legal texts, discuss interpretations, and engage in practical learning*”. Moreover, a central aspect of education in the gurukul was the method of ‘shastrartha’ (debate or intellectual discussion).

Students would engage in rigorous debates about the meaning and application of the law. That was more advanced method of teaching a student, which was followed during the ancient period, than the present era. As the time grew, the Jain scholars contributed significantly “*to the development of legal thought, particularly in the areas of non-violence (ahimsa), truth (satya), and justice. These ideas found their way into legal principles, influencing the broader culture of law in ancient India*”⁶ and Buddhist monastic communities also contributed to “*the legal tradition in ancient India. The Buddhist texts, like the Vinaya Pitaka, contain rules related to ethics and community governance, which influenced local legal norms*”.⁷

To impart the justice, in addition to royal courts, “*legal matters were often handled by local assemblies or panchayats in villages. These assemblies were composed of elders or learned individuals who would mediate and resolve disputes*”.⁸ In ancient Indian law various forms of punishment, but there was also an

⁶ DOUGLAS ALLEN, GANDHIAN PHILOSOPHY: THEORETICAL BASIS WITH PRIMACY OF PRACTICE (Oxford Academic 2019).

⁷ E N Mounika Sai, *Law in the Buddhist Tradition in Ancient Indian Society*, 9(6) RESEARCH REV. INT’L J. OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY (2024).

⁸ Tameem Zainulbhai, *Justice for All: Improving the Lok Adalat System in India*, 35(1) FORDHAM INT’L LAW J. (2016).

emphasis on restorative justice. There was a notion of reparation and reconciliation, where disputes between individuals could be resolved through compensation or community mediation.

Moreover, ancient India had various codified laws, such as the Manusmriti, which served as guidelines for judges and rulers. These texts covered a wide range of topics, including crime, family law, contracts, and property rights. It is submitted that in ancient India law was understood as a branch of Dharma. It is difficult to draw a distinction between secular law and religious ordinances in Ancient India. The Vedas were the original sources of law, and the Smritis announced the message of Vedas and Smriti Kars were great jurists.

In other words, it can be said that the Legal knowledge was never a foreign concept in India. In the past, our legal education history centred around the self-acquired concept of 'Dharma' tracing back to the Vedic Age. The moral and ethical code of conduct was practised through social customs and observances like 'yukti', 'nyaya', 'sadachara', etc. The moral and ethical code of conduct was practised through social customs and observances like 'yukti', 'nyaya', 'sadachara', etc. The custodians of the law were Nibhandakaras and Smrithikaras. Ancient literature like Manu Smriti even mentions the appointment of 'Niyogis' or legal practitioners, who represented people in the litigation process.

Over time, different court systems and laws evolved during the reigns of multiple rulers. However, standardised legal education programs and jobs were introduced during the reign of the British, under the tutelage of King George I. He established the mayor's courts in Calcutta,

Madras, and Bombay to observe law and order in the state. Between 1857 and 1957, the Supreme Court of India (“SC”) was established, and legal education jobs were created. After the implementation of the Indian Constitution in 1950, legal education gained significance, and a formal LL.B. degree originated, which is still in existence. Let us discuss the aims and objective of legal education in the present era.

V. LEGAL EDUCATION IN CONTEMPORARY ERA

In *Mohini Jain v. State of Karnataka*, Justice Kuldip Singh had emphasized that the “right to life” under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution inherently also contains the “right to education”, which is a precursor for ensuring dignity of an individual and fulfilment of other fundamental rights.⁹ He noted that education is not merely a privilege for the affluent but a constitutional mandate for all citizens, and the State has an obligation to provide educational facilities at all levels. Additionally, the “right to freedom of speech and expression” and other rights under Article 19 also cannot be fully appreciated without education.¹⁰

Furthermore, the Court linked the right to education to the Directive Principles of State Policy, reasoning that the fulfilment of the right to life requires enabling rights like literacy, nutrition, and shelter, which are foundational to a dignified life.¹¹ It was the court’s opinion that one is only able to obtain a dignified life in India through education,

⁹ *Mohini Jain (Miss) v. State of Karnataka*, (1992) 3 SCC 666.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Id.*

making education fundamental to the right to life, and therefore an obligation of the State to fulfil.

Legal education is a discipline that equips students with a thorough understanding of legal principles and provisions, preparing them for entry into the legal profession. Producing lawyers with a social conscience is the primary goal of legal education. But in the modern era, legal education ought to be seen as a tool for social design as well as a means of producing lawyers. The future of legal education in India is stable and exhibits a large number of youths taking law as their career options. The need is to integrate the technology in the curriculum.

Secondly, the online platform may be given proper recognition as it makes the learning of students very convenient and more time saving. Thirdly, the virtual moot courts and simulations may also be involved in the extracurricular activities. Lastly, the Artificial Intelligence and the legal research tools must be taught to the students to compete with the students of developed nations. The interdisciplinary approach also helps students to enhance the understanding of the students in learning. The most important is the focus on soft skill, communication and negotiations, etc. must be given emphasis while imparting legal education.

VI. ROLE OF BAR COUNCIL OF INDIA IN IMPARTING LEGAL EDUCATION

The BCI has undertaken various initiatives to enhance the quality of legal education, such as establishing accreditation standards, designing curricula and providing financial support to legal education institutions.

However, these efforts have fallen short of resolving all the challenges plaguing legal education in India. The system continues to face significant issues, including insufficient practical training and exposure, inadequate focus on research, and a disconnect between academic instruction and the evolving needs of the legal profession. While some institutions in India are recognized for their high-quality legal education, experts and practitioners widely consider the overall standard to be inadequate.

In response to these concerns, the BCI issued a circular to all Centres of Legal Education mandating immediate implementation of several measures.¹² The circular stated that the emerging subjects such as Blockchain Technology, Electronic Discovery, Cybersecurity, Robotics, Artificial Intelligence, and Bioethics must be integrated into the curriculum and taught in detail to prepare students for the future of legal practice.¹³

Emphasis on imparting a ‘profound and practical understanding of constitutional values’ including justice - social, economic, and political, in legal practice. The inclusion of more than one language is required. The regional languages must be adopted to enhance the access to Justice India. The need is to address critical and interdisciplinary thinking. The students must have a critical approach in Research to develop a comprehensive approach to addressing legal challenges.

¹² Bar Council of India, Comprehensive Implementation of Legal Education Reforms, Mandatory Guidelines, Norms & Rules of Legal Education, BCID-0468-2024 (LE Circular-06/2024), <https://www.barcouncilofindia.org/info/comprehens-ku2hwr>.

¹³ *Id.*

VII. PROBLEMS OF LEGAL EDUCATION IN INDIA

There are various challenges in imparting Legal Education in India. The poverty and cultural diversity also make it a herculean task. For example, in the landmark case of *Mohini Jain v. State of Karnataka*,¹⁴ highlighted that the imposition of a “capitation fee” renders education unaffordable and inaccessible to the economically downtrodden. It further held such fees arbitrary and violative of Article 14 (Equality Clause) of the Indian Constitution, as they prioritized income over merit. The court also clarified that such fees was not legitimate tuition fees but rather unlawful capitation fees, thus breaching the Karnataka Educational Institutions (Prohibition of Capitation Fee) Act, 1984.

There are several challenges associated with legal education in India, including:

1. ***Quality of Teaching:*** Many law schools in India are criticized for their substandard quality of teaching, inadequate resources, poor infrastructure, and a lack of well-trained, and motivated faculty.
2. ***Outdated Curriculum:*** The legal curriculum in India, is often criticized for being outdated and failing to address the evolving legal and social landscape, leaving the students ill-prepared for contemporary challenges.
3. ***Access to Legal Education:*** The high cost of legal education makes it unaffordable for individuals from lower socioeconomic strata, which then restricts the diversity within the legal profession.

¹⁴ *Mohini Jain (Miss) v. State of Karnataka*, (1992) 3 SCC 666.

4. ***Employment Opportunities:*** Despite a large number of law graduates, the legal sector offers limited employment opportunities, resulting in a surplus of unemployed or underemployed graduates.
5. ***Professionalism:*** There have been concerns regarding the lack of professionalism and ethical conduct among certain lawyers in India, which undermines the credibility of the legal profession and affects the delivery of justice.
6. ***Legal Aid and Access to Justice:*** It is important to note that India's legal aid system is underfunded and overburdened, creating significant barriers for marginalized communities in accessing justice.
7. ***Research and Innovation:*** A weak focus on research and innovation in legal education restricts the development of novel ideas and approaches to addressing complex legal issues.

VIII. REFORM IN INDIAN LEGAL EDUCATION

“Legal education must prepare students not just to earn a livelihood but to be ethical and responsible advocates of justice and equality in society.”

~ Justice M. H. Beg (Former Chief Justice of India)

Indian legal education stands at an important juncture, which requires substantial reforms to address contemporary challenges while abiding the constitutional values. Firstly, a crucial reform lies in the recognition of teaching as a form of research with Indian law schools being urged to implement the Knowledge Commission's Recommendations with caution by balancing the emphasis given on

teaching with research and publication in peer-reviewed journals. Rewarding educators who inspire future legal minds can further bolster teaching quality.¹⁵

Secondly, as highlighted by the BCI Circular, the curriculum must be modernized by introducing emerging subjects such as Blockchain Technology, Cybersecurity, Artificial Intelligence, and Bio-Ethics, equipping students with knowledge relevant to the evolving legal landscape.¹⁶ Thirdly, practical training should be prioritized, emphasizing on a profound understanding of constitutional values and integrating interdisciplinary thinking into legal education. This includes fostering bilingual or multilingual capabilities, especially in regional languages, to increase accessibility to justice across India's diverse population.

Fourthly, Indian legal education can be reformed by integrating research with teaching. Every lecture reflects a teacher's research and experience, and law schools should carefully implement the Knowledge Commission's recommendations, balancing teaching, research, and publication. The value of teaching must be recognized, and rewards should be given to those who inspire future scholars. Fifth, the current Legal Education has gap in theory and practice, and it must be removed in classroom teaching. The first gap is the inability to convey complex legal

¹⁵ National Knowledge Commission, *Report of the Nation 2007*, GOV'T OF INDIA 40, <https://epsiindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Knowledge-Commission-Report-20071.pdf>.

¹⁶ Ministry of Law and Justice, Circular to all Universities and Centres of Legal Education by Bar Council of India to incorporate subjects such as block chains, electronic discovery, cyber-security, robotics, Artificial Intelligence and bio-ethics etc. in their curricula Comprehensive Law Courses, PRESS INFORMATION BUREAU (Aug. 02, 2024), <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=2040667>.

principles to the public in simple, understandable terms. The problem is not just the complex language however, it is diversity in cultural differences due to that also everyone does not understand numerous languages and dialects, etc. due to which the law becomes complex and out of the reach of common man sometimes. Therefore, bridging the gap between theory and practice is essential. Legal education must simplify complex legal principles to make them comprehensible to the public, addressing linguistic and cultural diversity.

Lastly, introducing law courses in Hindi and other regional languages could significantly enhance inclusivity, allowing students to engage more effectively with community-specific legal issues, such as land disputes.¹⁷ Such localized education ensures that the legal professionals are not only skilled but also socially responsive, ready to address the interdisciplinary legal challenges of modern India.

IX. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This paper contends that legal education in India must evolve to address the dynamic challenges posed by globalisation and technological advancements while remaining grounded in constitutional values and social needs. This evolution has been underscored by the landmark *Mobini Jain v. State of Karnataka* case, which highlights education as a societal obligation essential for eradicating poverty and ensuring equality and that

¹⁷ *Teaching law in Indian Languages can Improve Legal Access: CJI Chandrachud*, THE INDIAN EXPRESS (July 14, 2024), <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/teaching-law-in-indian-languages-can-improve-legal-access-cji-chandrachud-9452029/>.

“*education has never been a commodity for sale*”.¹⁸ Additionally, the SC has observed that legal education must evolve to address the ever-growing demands of the society, ensuring that it is well-prepared to attend the multifaceted challenges posed by modern situations.¹⁹

Regulatory bodies such as the BCI have played a crucial role in promoting legal education. Their continuous efforts in updating curricula, accrediting programs, and incorporating emerging domains like blockchain, cybersecurity, and artificial intelligence deserve commendation.²⁰ These efforts not only enhance the quality of legal education but also reinforce public confidence in the judiciary and the broader legal framework.

However, to strengthen legal education in India, a multidimensional approach is essential. Integration of an interdisciplinary and comparative curriculum ensures that the students understand both global perspectives and social legal challenges in the domestic sphere. The incorporation of technological advancements in the field, such as AI-enabled research tools, application-based assessments, community enrichment programs, dissertations, e-learning platforms, industrial internships, virtual moot courts are vital in providing students with valuable practical skills and opportunities to engage with experts around the globe.

¹⁸ Mohini Jain (Miss) v. State of Karnataka, (1992) 3 SCC 666.

¹⁹ State of Maharashtra v. Manubhai Pragaji Vashi, (1995) 5 SCC 730.

²⁰ Bar Council of India, *supra* note 12.

The introduction of new amendments and laws has rendered legal compliance indispensable for businesses, significantly driving the expansion of the legal industry. Consequently, it's safe to say that law degree jobs will have an increasing scope in the future, and the industry is constantly evolving to meet the challenges of the changing times.

Although, globalisation has challenged Indian law schools to balance global perspectives with a strong understanding of domestic law. The subjects like the human rights, environmental law, and other global legal norms increasingly influence domestic legal systems. Thereby, the integration of comparative and international law will equip students for understanding global legal issues, while focusing on Indian legal system ensuring practical relevance. Therefore, partnerships, exchange programs, and joint degrees are key for cross-border insights, international careers, and training lawyers in diverse legal environments. To conclude, while global trends are crucial, a more flexible framework might be considered to integrate these advancements, ensuring Indian legal education evolves while staying rooted in democracy, justice and rule of law principles.