

**NATIONAL LAW UNIVERSITIES: ISSUES OF
DIVERSITY & INCLUSION**

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ABSTRACT

This article explores diversity and inclusion challenges in India's National Law Universities ("NLUs"). It highlights constraints faced by marginalised students, including caste, gender, financial limitations, and language barriers. Part I traces the historical evolution of legal education in India from ancient systems to modern institutions and further by emphasising the need for inclusive policies. Part II addresses how entrance exams like CLAT favour privileged students and create inequality in access. Part III examines the under-representation of religious and sexual minorities. It further calls for the adoption of certain anti-discrimination measures. Part IV discusses the impact of globalisation on Indian legal education and stresses the need for reforms to align with international standards. The article concludes with recommendations for improving curricula, increasing scholarships, and adopting more inclusive practices aimed at ensuring that NLUs reflect India's diverse society and prepare students for global legal challenges.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Diversity is omnipresent. It is everywhere but in different forms, since its role, importance, and variety vary from country to country, region to region and culture to culture. The concept of diversity in its broader sense, advocates inclusiveness and stimulates the understanding it, “*not only implies the enforcement of affirmative action as prescribed by law, but also entails other motivation for attending to diversity such as benefitting from the value of different perspectives in the workplace.*”¹ We need to move beyond mere compliance with affirmative action policies to achieve the laudable goal of diversity in law schools.

In society, some individuals live without or with limited individual rights, respect, and recognition. This creates social exclusion where recognition is denied.² While fostering inclusivity in higher education can have multiple layers, the author will here limit the analysis to National Law Universities (“**NLU**s”). What are the hurdles a student goes through in these islands of excellence, and what could we do as administrators? Understanding and acknowledging the problem is the first step that we must take to improve the situation.

¹ Rosemary Hays-Thomas, *Why now? The contemporary focus on managing diversity*, in *THE PSYCHOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT OF WORKPLACE DIVERSITY* 3- 30 (M. S. Stockdale & F. J. Crosby ed., 2004).

² C. N Lorentz, et al., *Diversity: Recognition of the Différance or Tolerated Difference? A Study on the Perception of Mining and Steel Professionals*, 17(4) *REVISTA DE ADMINISTRAÇÃO MACKENZIE* 39, 39-61 (2016).

II. SIGNIFICANCE OF DIVERSITY

Teams with diverse members often exhibit increased creativity which further leads to improved productivity and better overall performance.³ This suggests that organisations can amplify the positive outcomes of diversity by fostering an environment that values diverse perspectives while minimising social biases and divisions.⁴ Furthermore, effective diversity management strategies and policies can mitigate the potential drawbacks associated with a lack of diversity within the workplace.⁵

India is known as the land of diversity, it is the largest democracy in the world where diversity is represented majorly on several dimensions such as religion, caste, region, language, food, clothing, belief, faith, opinion etc.⁶ Traditionally, India has been a civilisational rather than a territorial entity. It is a nation held together not by language, religion, or geography but by an idea i.e. the idea of India. No word explains this idea better than the term diversity. It is the most diverse country in the world. Post-independence, India has been actively working towards valuing diversity and providing equal opportunities through implementing various policies

³ H. Peretz, A. Levi, & Y. Fried, *Organizational diversity programs across cultures: effects on absenteeism, turnover, performance and innovation*, 26(6) INT'L J. OF HUM. RES. MGMT. 875, 875-903 (2015).

⁴ R. J. Ely, & D. A. Thomas, *Cultural diversity at work: The effects of diversity perspectives on work group processes and outcomes*, 46(2) ADMIN. SCI. Q. 229, 229-273 (2001).

⁵ Baral, N. *What makes grassroots conservation organizations resilient? An empirical analysis of diversity, organizational memory, and the number of leaders*, 51(3) Environmental management 738, 738-749 (2013).

⁶ R. Haq, *The managing diversity mindset in public versus private organizations in India*, 23(5) The INT'L J. OF HUM. RES. MGMT. 892, 892-914 (2012).

and introducing affirmative action initiatives for inadequately represented groups.

Higher Educational Institutions (“**HEIs**”) too must reflect the country’s diversity, particularly in their students. These are places where diversity should not only be seen and felt, but also valued, acknowledged, and celebrated. The younger masses have the zeal in their minds and hearts to explore the world and the opportunities, with a strong desire to learn from each other. But sometimes there arise conflicts among them due to the differences in perspectives and beliefs. To maintain discipline and healthy relationships among students, faculty and staff, HEIs too need to have a properly structured diversity management system. In HEIs, where creation and transfer of knowledge are the fundamental end-goal goals, a diversity of ideas and ways of thinking is a matter of direct relevance. Studies show that a diverse organisational environment, in educational institutions, is more effective for the learning process than one that is less diverse or largely homogeneous.⁷

In India, culture, language, cuisine and opinion are diverse, yet the Indian constitution through Article 14 states that “*the State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India,*”⁸ and guarantees its citizens equality while preserving its diversity. Article 15 makes a provision for non-discrimination.⁹ One of the most

⁷ P. T. Terenzini et al., *Racial and ethnic diversity in the classroom: Does it promote student learning?*, 72(5) J. OF HIGHER EDUC. 509, 509-531(2001).

⁸ INDIA CONST. art. 14.

⁹ INDIA CONST. art. 15.

vibrant sectors of Indian democracy, where diversity and equality are expressed, acknowledged and celebrated are law schools.

As Dr. B. R. Ambedkar once said, “*It was, indeed, a way of life, which recognises liberty, equality, and fraternity as the principles of life and which cannot be divorced from each other: Without equality, liberty would produce the supremacy of the few over the many*”.¹⁰ The Indian Constitution’s preamble enshrines the principle of equality and guarantees equal opportunities for all citizens without discrimination. The Rule of Law upholds this principle by ensuring equal treatment and protection under the law for everyone.¹¹ Similar to a bouquet composed of diverse and vibrant flowers, successful organisations, whether governmental, corporate, or educational, thrive by effectively harnessing the skills and knowledge of a diverse workforce to achieve their collective goals.

Diversity has a crucial role in HEIs as it assists an organisation in ensuring legal compliance and to ensure social justice, conveys positive signals to stakeholders and provides equitable opportunities and helps in receiving positive feedback, both qualitative and quantitative, from those who prioritise diversity and inclusion.¹² The chances of achieving high-performance of a wider talent base that expands the knowledge base is an

¹⁰ Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, 8 CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY DEBATES, 979 (Lok Sabha Secretariat, 2014).

¹¹ J. K. Mittal, *Right to equality and the Indian Supreme Court*, AJCL 422, 422-45 (1965).

¹² M. Ali, & A. M. Konrad, *Antecedents and consequences of diversity and equality management systems: The importance of gender diversity in the TMT and lower to middle management*, 35(4) EUROPEAN MGMT. J. 440, 440-453 (2017).

additional benefit along with the enhancement of the potential for creativity and innovation.

The National Education Policy 2020 (“**NEP**”) emphasises the crucial role of diversity in education. It recognises that all students, regardless of their background or location, deserve access to high-quality education. The policy specifically focuses on supporting historically marginalised and disadvantaged groups by acknowledging the power of education to promote social and economic mobility, inclusion, and equality. The NEP mandates the implementation of targeted initiatives to ensure that students from these groups receive the necessary support and opportunities to succeed academically, overcoming any inherent challenges they may face.¹³

One of the fundamental principles that will guide both the education system at large, as well as the individual institutions. The NEP provides for “*respect for diversity and respect for the local context in all curricula, pedagogy, and policy, always keeping in mind that education is a concurrent subject*”.¹⁴ NEP has an entire section on ‘Multilingualism and the power of language’ highlighting the importance of mother tongue and language.

All public institutions must reflect the diversity of the nation. It is the fundamental duty of all citizens to promote diversity. Article 51A lays down the following:

¹³ MINISTRY OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT, NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020 4 (Government of India 2020).

¹⁴ *Id.* at 5.

“(e) to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities; to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women;

*(f) to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture;”*¹⁵

Thus, diversity has been given a lot of importance in our constitution.¹⁶

III. CLAT & DIVERSITY

The Common Law Admission Test (“**CLAT**”) is the primary entrance exam used for admission to National Law Universities in India. While the exam does serve a purpose in streamlining admissions, these common entrance exams can also have unintended consequences for diversity. A recent example is the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (“**NEET**”) for medical schools. There were concerns raised about its impact on underprivileged students and minority institutions and especially in a country with vast regional disparities in educational standards. However, the Supreme Court had focused more on the legality of such exams rather than the implications.¹⁷ Similar issues have been observed in the United States with standardised common tests. Studies have shown that these tests can favour students from wealthier backgrounds, white students, and those with political connections. In an attempt to address this bias,

¹⁵ INDIA CONST. art. 51 A.

¹⁶ FAIZAN MUSTAFA, DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT IN SAARC COUNTRIES, THIRTY YEARS OF SAARC: SOCIETY, CULTURE & DEVELOPMENT 239-251 (Rajiv Kumar & Omita Goyal eds., Sage 1st ed. 2016).

¹⁷ Faizan Mustafa, *NEET Fails in the Multi-Dimension Construct of Merit*, THE HINDU (Sept. 29, 2021), www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/neet-fails-the-multidimensional-construct-of-merit/article36724738.ece.

race-sensitive admissions criteria were introduced that also led to the Grutter judgment,¹⁸ but recently *Student for Fair Admission v. Harvard*.¹⁹ decision because of its conservative majority has limited the scope of these practices.¹⁹

Research by scholars like Sacks, Freedle, Wells, Camara, and Schmidt in the West has highlighted a significant limitation of common admission tests: their inability to assess crucial learning skills like imagination, curiosity, and motivation.²⁰ This criticism is relevant to NEET, which also fails to evaluate essential qualities for doctors, such as compassion, empathy, and a genuine desire to serve humanity. The Justice Rajan committee has substantiated this inherent bias in NEET that favours more students from privileged backgrounds.²¹ Similar investigations in other states are likely to uncover similar evidence of elitism within the system.

CLAT also suffers from similar drawbacks. It disproportionately benefits affluent students from urban centres. The burgeoning coaching industry surrounding CLAT further exacerbates this inequality as expensive coaching programs are often inaccessible to underprivileged students.

Entrance exams like CLAT and AILET heavily test English proficiency, inherently advantaging students from English-medium

¹⁸ Grutter v. Bollinger, 539 U.S. 306 (2003).

¹⁹ Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard, 600 U.S. 181 (2023).

²⁰ K. B. Murphy, Does Grit Matter? A Correlational Study of the Relationship Between Grit-S Assessment Scores and Student Retention in Undergraduate Online Programs (2019) (Graduate Theses, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville) (ScholarWork@UARK).

²¹ GOVT. OF TAMIL NADU, REPORT OF THE HIGH LEVEL COMMITTEE TO STUDY THE IMPACT OF NEET ON MEDICAL ADMISSIONS IN TAMIL NADU (2021).

schools, which are often expensive and exclusive. This systemic bias deprives the majority of Indian students, who lack access to English-medium education, of fair opportunities to enter elite law schools. In my report on Legal Education for the Union Ministry of Law & Justice, I had proposed that CLAT should at least be conducted in Hindi as well.²²

It is both important and enlightening to reflect on the findings of the ‘*A Study to Create Evidence-Based Proposals for Reform of Legal Education in India – Phase II*’ that was the study conducted on behalf of the Department of Justice, Ministry of Law and Justice, Government of India. It sheds light on critical issues that shape the institutional experiences of students. Remarkably, over 80% of respondents acknowledged that social differences, such as caste, gender, religion, financial background, and disability play a significant role in shaping their experiences within the institution.²³ A concerning 41.24% students described their coursework as exclusionary, highlighting that it heavily leans on the cultural capital of elitist sections of society, leaving others feeling alienated.²⁴ The onus to reduce or attempt to extinguish these differences lies on the administration of these NLUs.

IV. STUDENTS WITH POOR BACKGROUND

Legal Education is not affordable to many students, particularly from the poorer states. While private colleges are coming up with fees of

²² DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, MINISTRY OF LAW & JUSTICE, A STUDY TO CREATE EVIDENCE-BASED PROPOSALS FOR REFORM OF LEGAL EDUCATION IN INDIA—PHASE II (Government of India 2021).

²³ *Id.* at 120.

²⁴ *Id.*

more than 40-50 lakhs. It is the NLUs that become the hope of every common citizen. But due to the lack of financial support from the University Grant Commission (“UGC”) and the state governments, these institutions too are largely self-financed and accordingly, the fees at these Institutions range anywhere between INR 12.5 to 18 lakhs for a five-year programme. This amount does not take into account any other expenses like the need of a laptop, other study materials or the cost of travelling to Metropolitan cities to pursue an internship to secure placement opportunities.

While the IDIA Survey conducted among the students of 4 NLUs i.e. National Law University of India University, Bengaluru, National Academy of Legal Studies and Research University of Law, Hyderabad (“NALSAR”), West Bengal National University of Juridical Sciences, Kolkata;²⁵ and National Law University, Delhi showed about 37.2% students had a family income of more than 15 Lakhs per annum.²⁶ In yet another survey conducted by NALSAR, 47.7% of the students had marked the fee charged by the Institution to be ‘High’ while 28% had characterised it to be ‘Very High’. While on question as to if the students feel the financial assistance provided to them is sufficient. A majority of 39.2% of students had response as ‘Low’ while 29.7% considered it to be ‘Very Low’.²⁷

²⁵ Kirtikar Srivastava, *Diversity Survey Report 2021-2022, Increasing Diversity by Increasing Access to Legal Education*, IDIA (2024), <https://www.idialaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/IDIA-Diversity-Report-2021-22.pdf>.

²⁶ *Id.* at 29.

²⁷ Department of Justice, *supra* note 22, at 46–48.

Unlike other NLUs, Chanakya National Law University (“CNLU”) does have a lot of diversity and caters to the underprivileged - state reservation is high. Most students are on scholarships provided by the government of Bihar. There are many students in CNLU whose annual income is less than one lakh. Such a thing was not there in either in NALSAR or even in NLUO. The IDIA survey also reported 10.6% students on loan.²⁸ It is a sharp contrast from the situation in CNLU. We have around 50% students on government funded scholarships and the majority of the students are studying on Loan. Now, this situation also shows stark differences between different NLUs. At CNLU, I have students who themselves had to earn prior to joining the University just to afford their coaching fees. Now when they enter law schools, it is a new ecosystem that they have to cope up. These are the students who need special care and attention.

To overcome this problem, NLUs must come up with the huge scholarship scheme. At NALSAR, I had raised it from 2.7 lakh in 2012 to 1 crore in 2022. At CNLU, this year I have allocated 15 lakhs to help the poorest of the poor students.

V. LANGUAGE BARRIER

Students from privileged backgrounds, particularly those who attended expensive private schools though called public schools, leverage their early exposure to English, gaining an enduring advantage throughout their undergraduate legal studies. These systemic barriers underline the

²⁸ *Id.* at 30.

urgent need for reforms in entrance exam design and classroom inclusivity to ensure equitable access to premier legal education for all.

As per the report of IDIA: The findings from a pan-India survey conducted by the National Statistical Office (“NSO”), Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation, reveal a glaring disparity in access to quality legal education based on language proficiency. The NSO reported that only about 16.7% of students in India study in English-medium schools.²⁹ Contrastingly, the present survey showed that 95.11% of students in premier NLUs came from English-medium schools. Over 96% of surveyed students attended English-medium institutions at the higher secondary level.³⁰ This overwhelming dominance highlights how English proficiency acts as a gateway to securing admission to top NLUs.” While these figures could be different for different NLUs, there is a clear domination of English medium students. Non-English medium students do face systematic disadvantage in this regard.

For students from non-English-medium backgrounds who manage to gain admission in NLUs, the challenges persist. Most classes, co-curricular activities, and extra-curricular activities such as moot courts and debates are conducted in sophisticated English. This creates a dual-layered obstacle, not only in academics but also in campus integration. Many such students experience a cultural and linguistic shock, further exacerbated by the fact that English is rarely their primary language at home. Currently, at

²⁹ HOUSEHOLD SOCIAL CONSUMPTION ON EDUCATION IN INDIA, MINISTRY OF STATISTICS AND PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION (Government of India 2017).

³⁰ Kirtikar Srivastava, *supra* note 25.

CNLU, we have a Tamil student who does not know either English or Hindi. I provided a faculty mentor to him but he is still struggling. In an unprecedented decision, I permitted an oral end-semester examination for him in the last semester.

Even other students, particularly from marginalised sections of society, spend around a year just to improve their English, facing significant hurdles during the initial years of their study.

To improve English, we must have special sessions for the students coming from vernacular mediums. CNLU has signed an MoU with the ISB to help us in this regard.

VI. CHALLENGES FACED BY SEXUAL MINORITIES

The NLUs in India are regarded as premier institutions for legal education. However, despite their stature, LGBTQ candidates often encounter significant challenges that hinder inclusivity and create barriers to equality. One of the primary challenges faced by LGBTQ students is the absence of clear anti-discrimination policies in NLUs. Most NLUs lack dedicated guidelines or grievance mechanisms to address discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. The absence of such institutional frameworks often leaves LGBTQ students vulnerable to harassment and discrimination.

Housing policies in NLUs are typically rigid and segregated by binary gender norms, creating significant challenges for transgender and non-binary students. They often face difficulties in accessing accommodation that aligns with their gender identity, leading to discomfort

and a lack of privacy. Legal education in NLUs rarely engages with queer jurisprudence or the rights of LGBTQ individuals in a comprehensive manner. This invisibility perpetuates ignorance among students and faculty, further marginalising LGBTQ voices. At NALSAR, it took me days to convince my administrative team to agree to shift a transgender student from a boys' to a girls' hostel. Similarly, in CNLU, despite my keen interest, I could not accommodate a similar request. Of course, to make life easier for such a student, I gave that student an out-of-turn single seated room.

Even small initiatives like the removal of Mr/Ms from NALSAR degrees and gender-neutral washrooms were widely appreciated in the national media.

The number of students from Sexual Minorities is rising and I have witnessed this in the last Academic years at CNLU. This may be because of growing awareness and exposure that these students can identify as to who they are. In this regard, we also need to sensitise our campus environment so that they are readily accepted and don't feel alienated

VII. POOR REPRESENTATION OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

It is pertinent to note that the *IDLA Diversity Survey Report 2021-22* highlighted gross under-representation of the Muslim community.³¹ “*While Muslims constitute around 14% of India's population, only 3.42% of the students admitted to the leading NLUs belonged to the Muslim community.*”³² Other religious minorities except Zoroastrians are well represented.

³¹ Kirtikar Srivastava, *supra* note 25.

³² *Id.* at 5.

Even at CNLU, the figures are only close to 5% and if we look at representation from female Muslim students, the figures are really concerning.

VIII. HIGH SUICIDE RATES AMONG MEMBERS OOF DISADVANTAGED SECTIONS INCLUDING SCs AND STs

As per Government data - 35,950 students had committed suicide between 2019-2021.³³ Some of them come from Higher Educational Institutions.

While entry is given to the students from marginalised backgrounds following Government guidelines on reservation, these students have the same passing and promotion rules as other students. There is a growing aspiration among these marginalised background students to climb up the economic hierarchy to overcome social barriers. But many times such students end their lives.

It is a matter of fact that NLUs have to give good research output and at the same time there are aspirational students from marginalised communities who have had no such exposure who at times struggle to even get passing marks and promotion. They do face issues of finances, the digital divide, and the language barrier among others. Something we should also ponder upon is the academic stress these students face.

³³ HT Correspondent, *35,950 students died by suicide between 2019-21: Govt tells Parliament*, HINDUSTAN TIMES (2023), <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/35950-students-died-by-suicide-between-2019-21-govt-tells-parliament-101701787158684.html>.

There has been a growing number of suicides among students from prestigious universities including the NLU's. The reasons do include academic stress which is highly prevalent among members from the disadvantaged section. Back in 2013, I had an opportunity to chair a committee to consider the short-term and long-term measures to reduce student stress in compliance with the directions of the Andhra Pradesh High Court in PIL No.106 of 2013 and the Orders of the Hon'ble High Court dated 30.4.2013.³⁴ I had suggested following short-term and few long-term measures to overcome the problem of suicides:

A. SHORT-TERM

1. The UGC should establish a dedicated task force to monitor student mental health and prevent suicides. This task force should operate similarly to anti-ragging committees, proactively identifying and addressing academic and emotional distress.
2. Each instance of student suicide should be thoroughly investigated by an internal university committee. This committee must have adequate representation from marginalised communities, including Scheduled Castes ("SC"), Scheduled Tribes ("ST"), Other Backward Classes ("OBC"), and minority groups.
3. Before taking disciplinary actions like detention or expulsion, the university's disciplinary committee must mandatorily consult with the Student Grievance Committee.

³⁴ PIL No.106 of 2013, Andhra Pradesh High Court

4. To address student grievances and appeals against decisions of the Student Grievance Committee, universities should establish a system of University Ombudsmen, as per Government of India guidelines.
5. To ensure effective grievance resolution, larger universities should consider establishing Academic Grievance Committees at the departmental level.
6. Universities should implement preparatory and bridge courses to support marginalised students, including SC/ST/OBC students, students with disabilities, first-generation learners, and economically disadvantaged students. Peer learning systems should be encouraged wherever possible.
7. In addition to employing professional counsellors, universities should explore the use of Restorative Justice techniques, a successful model adopted by NALSAR University of Law, to address student well-being.
8. Universities must adhere to their academic schedules, ensuring timely completion of courses and the declaration of results, especially for supplementary examinations.
9. All universities must actively implement the UGC Regulation on Promotion of Equity in Higher Educational Institutions, 2012, to ensure equal opportunities and eliminate discrimination on campus.

B. LONG TERM

1. The universities should endeavour to put in place a systematic system of getting students' feedback on the quality of teaching, student services, and institutional infrastructure.
2. All committees constituted by the universities should preferably have external members from the SC, ST, OBC and minority communities.

IX. DIGITAL DIVIDE

The issue of digital access and affordability in India highlights the stark inequalities in access to education through EdTech platforms. A typical EdTech product costs approximately ₹20,000 per year, equivalent to 77.5% of the per capita income for the lowest wealth quintile of Indian households, whose average annual income is ₹25,825. This makes such services largely unaffordable for the bottom 20% of Indian households.³⁵

The 2017-18 National Sample Survey Office's report on Social Consumption of Education highlights a significant digital divide in India's education system. A mere 9% of students have access to a computer with internet while 25% have internet access through any device. The disparities are particularly pronounced between urban and rural areas with 21% of urban students having access to a computer with internet compared to only 4% in rural areas. This stark difference underscores the urgent need to bridge the digital divide to ensure equitable access to education for all students.³⁶

Access is also significantly influenced by socioeconomic status. Students from the richest 10% of households have the highest access to digital infrastructure, while marginalised communities remain largely excluded. For instance, only 4% of Scheduled Tribe and 4% of Scheduled Caste students have access to a computer with internet, compared to 7%

³⁵ OXFAM INDIA, DIGITAL DIVIDE, INDIA INEQUALITY REPORT (2022), <https://www.oxfamindia.org/knowledgehub/workingpaper/india-inequality-report-2022-digital-divide>.

³⁶ *Id.*

of OBCs and 21% of students from the ‘Others’ caste group. These disparities emphasise the urgent need for targeted policies to bridge the digital divide and ensure equitable access to education for all.

For the students coming from underprivileged backgrounds, it is difficult for them to adapt to technical means of first using a laptop and then writing a Research Paper quickly from the first semester itself. To somehow minimise the digital divide, Both at NALSAR as well as CNLU, I started a laptop bank, and the old laptops of faculty members were given to deserving students.

X. PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

In the context of the recent Supreme Court ruling in the case of *Rajive Raturi v. Union of India*,³⁷ 2024 which addressed disability rights, it is crucial to examine the inclusion of students with disabilities (“**PWD**”) in legal education. According to the *IDLA Diversity Survey Report, 2021-2022* conducted, 9.62% of the students³⁸ identified themselves as persons with disabilities, underscoring the need for greater accessibility and inclusion in educational institutions.

Under Section 32 of the Right of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (“**2016 Act**”), all government institutions of higher education, including those receiving financial aid from the government, must reserve at least 5% of seats for persons with benchmark disabilities. A person with benchmark disabilities is defined as one who suffers from 40% or more of

³⁷ *Rajive Raturi v. Union of India*, 2024 SCC OnLine SC 3217.

³⁸ Kirtikar Srivastava, *supra* note 25.

any type of disability, as per the Act's Schedule. This provision was reinforced by the Supreme Court in the case of *Disability Rights Group & Anr. v. Union of India*,³⁹ where the Court directed that all government-aided institutions of higher education must adhere to this statutory requirement. The Court further mandated that institutions submit annual reports to the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities or the State Commissioner, to ensure that these provisions are not merely symbolic but are being implemented effectively.

However, students with disabilities face significant challenges within educational settings. A recurring difficulty for them, particularly in the context of legal education, is the accessibility of learning materials. Making class notes during lectures or attempting to read them afterwards becomes cumbersome due to issues like small font sizes in textbooks and other reading materials. Even with the availability of accessibility labs in libraries that assist with listening to materials, devices such as computers, laptops, and smartphones often cause eye strain, worsening existing visual impairments. This strain is exacerbated by the pressure of completing multiple assignments, and other coursework, all of which require extensive use of computers. This prolonged screen exposure significantly impacts the vision and well-being of students with disabilities, highlighting the need for better support systems and alternative accommodations.

Digital Accessibility labs have been established at CNLU Library. The infrastructure in the campus has been made to accommodate the needs of differently abled members of the University. With regards to Housing

³⁹ *Disabled Rights Group v. Union of India*, (2018) 2 SCC 397.

facilities for students, I have been able to reserve the ground floor rooms at NALSAR. There is an urgent need for all of us to make faculty and staff housing differently abled friendly.

There exists another issue of inclusion of faculty members with special needs. Those who are differently-abled. Even at a time when most of the National Law Universities have complied with the requirements of giving 5% of horizontal reservation to differently-abled students, the situation looks less encouraging in the PWD's representation in the faculty.

Now suppose the recruitment has been done. Do we have housing facilities to meet the special requirements of these faculty members is something to be asked. What are the promotion opportunities available to such members of our teaching community?

XI. LIMITED CAREER CHOICES

On the topic of career accessibility, an overwhelming 87.23%⁴⁰ of respondents admitted that their ultimate career choices are significantly influenced by their socio-economic background. This points to a glaring inequality in opportunities, particularly for those from underprivileged backgrounds.

This point highlighted by this study is equally concerning. We must understand that the Universities exist for and because of students. We have to diversify legal education to suit everybody's needs. We will have to guide them towards something they wish to do in their life based on our

⁴⁰ *Id.* at 12.

experiences and exposure. We will have to make Research work rewarding for the students so that students from marginalised backgrounds are also able to think of this as a career option.

Students from marginalised sections of the society more often than not require financial stability and security and that becomes a big reason why a number of them appear for government services like Civil Services and Judicial Services. A majority of them also join corporate sector. In CNLU, most of the students prepare for the Government services. A number of these students are the first ones in generations to be formally educated at undergraduate level yet their performance in judicial services is outstanding.

It is apparent that guiding and motivating students is our primary work. We need to create an environment where students' legitimate aspirations thrive and grow. We also need to work on developing capacities whereby a student from marginalised communities has the option to choose a career traditionally unavailable to him. Universities must come up with creative ideas.

We must come forward to make our campuses inclusive in the true sense of the term. We owe a duty towards underprivileged sections of our students. We need to hold their hands.

XII. CONCLUSION

This Article traced the historical evolution of legal education and examined how entrance exams like CLAT disproportionately benefit privileged students and limit opportunities for those from

underrepresented backgrounds. The discussion also brings attention to the under-representation of religious and sexual minorities in NLUs. There is thus the need for stronger anti-discrimination measures and inclusive policies.

Additionally, the impact of globalisation on legal education which focuses on the importance of equipping students with the skills to thrive in an increasingly interconnected legal landscape is focused. To ensure that NLUs meet both domestic and global demands, the article advocates for reforms in curricula, improved access to legal education, and enhanced support for marginalised students. These efforts will help create a more inclusive environment and prepare legal professionals to succeed in both national and international settings. This will ultimately lead to the formation of a more equitable legal system.