

Social Responsibility and Legal Education in India: A Study in Special Reference to National Law Universities

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Abstract

The further the cause of imparting global-standard legal education, India established the National Law Universities (NLUs) all over the country in the last few decades (Government of India, 1986). Besides dissemination of enriched legal education, NLUs have constantly contributed as valued partners in sustainable development through various Centres for Research and Development. This chapter explores the functioning of the centres established by NLU's in India, with respect to social responsibility. It recommends the areas to be explored by the Centres in the future and maps the Centres' objectives with the SDGs.

Keywords

academic social responsibility – teaching and research – centre for excellence

1 Introduction

If you want to find God, serve [humans]. (Swami Vivekanand)

The ancient Indian education system and its teaching pedagogy is amongst the finest examples of institutions imbibing social responsibility attributes in individuals (Nair, 2016). Shishyas, the disciples in the Gurukul system of education in ancient India, served society under the guidance of the Guru – the preceptor – while residing in an ashram – a residential school – in the learning phase of life (Chandwani, 2019; Nair, 2016). Teaching for life and skills to protect, serve and promote the goodness in the society was the essence and outcome of Gurukul education (Chandwani, 2019; Kashalkar & Thakersey, 2013; Sharma & Nemade, 2018).

Indian literature and epics surface various examples of a student's social responsibility (Yadav, 2018). For instance, Lord Rama, along with his brother, Lakshmana, killed the *rakshasas* (demons) to protect humanity, at the command of the sage Vashishtha (Saran, 2014).

The question arises if we are following the same footprints or have forgotten these values in the journey towards professionalism, money and fame. Does education still target the holistic development of students, or does it focus on materialistic gain? The actuals of social responsibility in educational institutions can answer this.

2 Social Responsibility to Academic Social Responsibility

The social environment, inclusive of family, peers, educational institutions and the virtual world, plays an important role in carving an individual's personality (Boocok, 1973; Brofenbrner, 1979; Otman et al., 2018; Quintero et al., 2015).

Educational institutions, being the formal platform for learning, play a vital role in defining an individual's personality and their holistic development (Perason Academy, 2017). Educational institutions teach their students how to reside in a social order (Infed Org, 2020). Since the role of educational institutions in imbibing the values of social responsibility among individuals is crucial, it is important to explore how social responsibility is approached at educational institutions. Social responsibility is often defined in terms of corporate, trade and business as 'corporate social responsibility' (UNIDO, 2020). A comprehensive definition of social responsibility, in relation to academia, is yet to be articulated. Thus, we define academic social responsibility in research as student participation in activities which have a social impact and service to society through social welfare programmes, policies and practices adopted by educational institutions.

3 Social Responsibility Policy Framework in India and Legal Education

UNESCO's publications and initiatives to encourage social responsibility have escalated the urge for the incorporation of social responsibility among students by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across the globe (Tandon, 2014). Although HEIs have their own specialities and diversities, in terms of subjects, faculties and purposes for their establishments, many have found unique ways to serve societies. For example, the National Law Universities (NLUs) in India

have established their social responsibility activities by setting up mandatory pro-bono service as an academic requirement (Gupta, 2017).

The Indian governmental institutions, such as the Planning Commission of India (now NITI Aayog), Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) and the University Grants Commission (UGC), along with other different stakeholders, have taken initiatives to ensure that education inculcates social responsibility and connects students to their communities. The sub-committee on strengthening community engagement in higher education in India was set up by NITI Aayog in 2011, and proposed community engagement at universities (UNESCO Chair, 2012). The UGC also established the Centre for Fostering Social Responsibility and Community Engagement at Indian Universities, which includes central, state and deemed universities who receive grants and aid from UGC and are accredited by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (UGC, 2019). The Bar Council of India mandates the practice of giving legal aid, which is essential to inculcate the culture of social responsibility among students of law, under different provisions of the Rules of Legal Education, 2008, including Part IV, Chapter III, rules 18 and 31; Schedule II, entry 24; and Schedule III, entry 11 (BCI, 2010). Universities in India, including NLUS, have welcomed these initiatives (Gupta, 2017).

4 Social Responsibility and National Law Universities in India

To further impart global-standard legal education to its populace, India established National Law Universities all over the country (Government of India, 1986). Besides teaching legal education, NLUS have consistently contributed as valued partners in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2020), through various committees and Centres of Excellence for Research and Development, which initiate activities with social impacts.

The centres comprise of faculties and students with an objective to serve any sector of society. For example, the Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy in NLU Bangalore, the Centre for Disability Studies, the National Academy of Legal Studies and Research (NALSAR, 2020), and the Centre for Human Welfare and Empowerment at NLU Jodhpur. Through these centres, the NLUS have formalised social responsibility and service to communities. Most of the initiatives are free for the public, including blood donation camps and a legal aid clinic by the Centre for Law and Society at Gujarat NLU. The activities, ground functioning and research by the centres evoke policy-based ideas among the student and faculty, resulting in the development of these ideas as recommendations, new or model policies and laws to be

made and amended. Thus, the social responsibility inculcated in students has become an indispensable part of higher education in India, especially at NLUs.

NLUs in India are constantly working on research projects to evaluate the standard of legal awareness and implementation of welfare legislations at ground level (GNLU, 2020). They provide free legal aid services as well (NLU Delhi, 2020; NLU Jodhpur, 2020; RMLNLU, 2020).

Data for Centres at NLUs encouraging Social Responsibility among Students

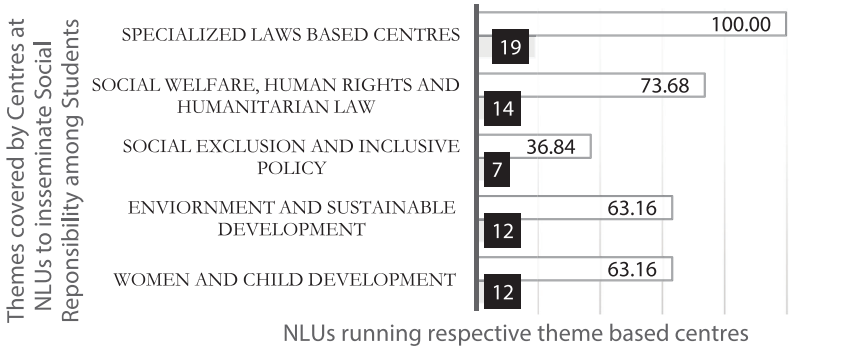


FIGURE 12.1 Data for centres at NLUs encouraging social responsibility among students

Figure 12.1 depicts the data of 19 NLUs in India functioning to incorporate social responsibility among students. Data has been collected from NLUs in Bangalore, Delhi, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Bhopal, Jodhpur, Gandhinagar, Patiala, Patna, Kochi, Cuttack, Ranchi, Vishakhapatnam, Tiruchirappalli, Mumbai, Vishakhapatnam, Nagpur, and Simla, and has been collected from the respective websites. The NLUs have been running between 3 to 23 Centres for Excellence, focussing on advancing knowledge, building a practical approach and research in teaching. NLUs in India bring together a wide variety of disciplinary expertise including Law, SWociology, Anthropology, Politics, Science and Technology, Environment, Sustainable Development, International Relations, Human Rights, Economics, Geography and Art History, through the Centres, to examine the interface of law and society. The participation of students in centres seems to be an opportunity for them to directly interact with contemporary issues and challenges, and help them to engage in activities organised by the Centres, such as ground and policy-oriented research, legal aid clinics, environmental protection initiatives, free counselling to women and people from marginalised backgrounds, working in villages adopted by universities, programmes for creating awareness and developing affiliations with society with due responsibility.

In Figure 12.1, Centres at the NLUS are classified under various themes by the authors, including Women and Child Development; Environment and Sustainable Development; Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy; Social Welfare, Human Rights and Humanitarian Law; and Specialised Laws Based Centres.

4.1 *Women and Child Development*

There are Centres focussing on women and law, and women's empowerment and child development at 12 NLUS (63% of the total NLUS in the study). These Centres research, organise programmes and hold discussions around the position of women and children in the Indian legal system and society. These Centres are working to escalate women's mobility, build their capacity and leadership skills, and empower them. For example, the Centre for Human Rights, Women Empowerment and Child Development at NLU Jodhpur carries out activities such as liaising with local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to organise workshops, training programmes, seminars, state and national level legal consultations and publications (NLU Jodhpur, 2020). Centres focussing on Child Development are engaging in research on the complicated strands that bind the child and law. These include the Centre for Child Rights at the National University of Study and Research in Law, the Centre for Child Rights at Chanakya NLU, Patna and the Centre for Child and Law at Damodaram Sanjiviya NLU.

The Centre for Child and Law at Damodaram Sanjiviya NLU organises conferences, workshops, legal awareness programmes and performs research by involving the stakeholders to realise the rights of children (DSNLU Vishakhapatnam, 2020).

4.2 *Environment and Sustainable Development*

One of the most deliberated issues at a global level is the environment. Climate literacy is important in order to combat and slow down climate change and restore the environment to make it inhabitable. The integration of environmentalism and climate change education in higher education curriculum is important, since education and awareness are key to solving the problems we face. 12 NLUS (63%) are working to promote legal education and research in the field of environmental law. These include the Centre for Environmental Law, Climate Change & Sustainable Development at Gujarat NLU and the Centre for Advanced Studies in Energy Laws at Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law, Patiala.

The Earth, the air, the land and the water are not an inheritance from our forefathers but on loan from our children. So, we have to handover to them as it was handed over to us. (Mahatma Gandhi)

We have to acknowledge the intergenerational or intragenerational impact of climate change. The present situation of the COVID-19 pandemic has triggered the re-set button, and nature is teaching us a lesson in forcefully reclaiming its space. It is our duty to educate the younger generation towards this. The GNLU Centre for Environmental Law, Climate Change & Sustainable Development, with its motto of education and research, has different programmes for students, government authorities and other stakeholders. On special occasions such as World Environment Day and Wildlife Week, we screen small documentaries and share information with students in all classes, to help raise awareness. Workshops for grassroots communities on biodiversity, along with trainings for the Gujarat State Forest officers and Gujarat Biodiversity Board, were organised, to empower the community with policy decisions and legal knowledge around the environment.

Centre for Environmental Law, Climate Change & Sustainable Development at Gujarat National Law University supports studies, research, capacity building and consultation for all the stakeholders, including the grassroots communities, industries and administrative authorities (GNLU, 2020).

4.3 *Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy*

Some of the Centre at NLUS aspire to create an empowering legal discourse on social exclusion and inclusive policy, disability rights and the rights of the disadvantaged and minorities, through writing and research, teaching and training, dialogue, discussions and consultations (NALSAR, 2020). 7 of the NLUS (37%) have centres working towards creating an inclusive society. These include the Centre for Disability Studies and Health Laws at NLU Assam, Tribal Rights Advocacy Centre at NLU Cuttack, and the Centre for Disability Studies at the National Academy of Legal Study & Research University of Law, Hyderabad.

4.4 *Social Welfare, Human Rights and Humanitarian Law*

Few Centres at NLUS focuses on human rights, including civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. 14 NLUS (74%) have centres which support initiatives working on social welfare, human rights and humanitarian law. These include the Centre for Industrial Relations and Labour Laws at NLU Cuttack and the Centre for Human Rights and Citizenship Studies at National University of Juridical Sciences.

The Centre for Industrial Relations and Labour Laws at NLU Cuttack focuses on extensive field work and research to generate authentic and reliable database (NLUO, 2020).

4.5 *Specialised Law-Based Centres*

All NLUs have various law-based centres in various fields such as intellectual property rights, constitutional law, maritime law, international law, labour laws, business and corporate laws, criminal laws and air and space law.

They also have innovative law based centres such as the Centre for Legal Philosophy and Justice Education at the National Academy of Legal Study & Research University of Law, Hyderabad; the Centre for Wellness and Counselling at NLU Jodhpur; the Centre for Sports and Entertainment Law at Gujarat NLU; and the Centre for Communication Governance and Centre for Transparency and Accountability in Governance at NLU Delhi.

5 **Social Responsibility, SDGs and NLUs**

NLUs in India are dedicated and responsible institutions in the field of law, society and policies, integrating different domains of law with an inter-disciplinary approach. With the SDGs in place, NLUs have focussed on initiating activities in relation to the SDGs. Institutions have started collaborating with industry and universities to initiate trans- and inter-disciplinary research, opening up different arenas and dimensions of social responsibility related activities.

SDGs can be helpful to guide HEIs to formulate social responsibility policies. The following analysis, displayed in Table 12.1, shows the incorporation of SDGs in the agendas of the Centres of Excellence at NLUs. The table depicts the possible integration of SDGs in the vision and missions of the Centres of Excellence at NLUs.

6 **Social Responsibility and Gujarat National Law University: A Case Study**

Gujarat National Law University (GNLU) has various examples of outcome-based teaching and learning processes. The academic delivery at GNLU has resulted in various activities being undertaken by students and alumni.

At the GNLU Incubation Centre, students have received an opportunity to initiate start-ups and activities catering the the larger society. These include:

- Catharsis Magazine: A student-led, online, bimonthly magazine, which focuses on relevant contemporary issues, ideas and culture. The Law Learners: Aimed at familiarising people with the laws, by organising free certificate courses and competitions to spread legal awareness. This project was

TABLE 12.1 Centres for excellence and SDGs

Goal	Agenda SDG	Role of NLUS	Outcome/contribution
Goal 1	No poverty	Projects, research and publications to highlight actual data on poverty, health and nutrition	Awareness raising to stimulate students to fight against poverty
Goal 2	Zero hunger	Projects, research and publications to highlight actual data on poverty, health and nutrition	Awareness raising to stimulate students to fight against hunger
Goal 3	Good health and well-being	Blood donation camps; sanitation awareness drives; cleanliness drives under the 'Clean India Movement'; taking care of nearby villages, poverty prone areas and school children to make them aware, responsible and healthy citizens	Inculcating the culture of and spreading awareness amongst the students, university staff and people in the surrounding community of becoming healthy
Goal 4	Quality education	Clinical legal education awareness, moot courts, teaching drives	Giving the youth a practical understanding to be the better skilled professionals to contribute to the society at large; making students responsible mentors and guides for the people in need
Goal 5	Gender equality	Drives and events for gender sensitisation, third gender rights and other related issues, sexual harassment at workplace awareness, addressing issues and special policies for female athletes	Educating and sensitiing the students, faculty and staff about gender equality, health and hygiene etc.; spreading awareness about the different laws available for gender related matters, securing and safeguarding the rights related to gender equality and health insurance and other matters; awareness raising about policies and guidance on utilising them

(cont.)

TABLE 12.1 Centres for excellence and SDGs (*cont.*)

Goal	Agenda SDG	Role of NLUS	Outcome/contribution
Goal 6	Clean water and sanitation	Activities for environmental awareness, climate change and sustainable development	Sensitising people about the sustainable use and development of the environment
Goal 7	Affordable and clean energy	Activities related to energy laws implementation; environmental and climate change awareness with renewable resources	Developing responsible behaviour towards energy resources
Goal 8	Decent work and economic growth	Policy suggestions on better economic growth; understanding the intersections of law with economics, business policies and corporate legal framework; promotion of drives and research on equal work for equal pay and better labour conditions	Developing a better future for the economic health of individuals
Goal 9	Industry innovation and infrastructure	Incubation activities to train incubatees; promotion of legal start-ups and innovative approaches to law	Few start-ups and innovative approaches have developed a direct link with the different sectors and populations of the society

(cont.)

TABLE 12.1 Centres for excellence and SDGs (*cont.*)

Goal	Agenda SDG	Role of NLUS	Outcome/contribution
Goal 10	Reduce inequalities	Activities and policy suggestions for reducing inequalities and promoting equality in different strata and segments of society; inclusive admission processes, including giving preference to students from underdeveloped nations; committees and centres on disability rights and other marginalised people	Promotion of an equality-based approach and raising awareness about it
Goal 11	Sustainable cities and communities	Awareness drives regarding sustainable development and the adoption of villages	Preparing responsible citizens
Goal 12	Responsible consumption and production	Environmental awareness activities; research in consumer behaviour, rights and other related aspects	Awareness about the responsible choices, consumer behaviour and their rights
Goal 13	Climate action	Activities for environmental awareness, climate change and sustainable development	Sensitising people about the sustainable use and development of the environment
Goal 14	Life below water	Environmental awareness activities in relation with the maritime	Environmental awareness in relation with the maritime

(cont.)

TABLE 12.1 Centres for excellence and SDGs (cont.)

Goal	Agenda SDG	Role of NLUS	Outcome/contribution
Goal 15	Life on land	Environment sensitisation programmes at the ground level	Environmental sensitisation
Goal 16	Peace justice and strong institutions	Academic programmes and courses to uphold international law; the Gandhian approach; legal aid programmes	Sensitisation about peaceful co-existence and methods of dispute resolution
Goal 17	Partnerships for the goals	International collaborations for research and teaching with academic institutions, corporates and endowment agencies	Cross-section and comparative studies to develop theories, regulations and applications

incubated under GNLU and recognised and funded by the Government of Gujarat, under the Student Startup & Innovation Policy (SSIP). Law Briefs: Law Briefs is India's first legal service platform that prepares on-demand structured case summaries of Indian judgments.

- SoCo: SoCo (Socially Connected) is a social work based start-up, focussing on reconnecting people by giving them a chance to give back to society through social work, and facilitate them to do work that will make a difference. It works with the *Swachh Bharat Abhiyan* (Clean India Movement), teaching programmes, Adopt-a-Village programmes and talk shows, among others. They have spread their work across Gujarat, Assam, Bihar, West Bengal, Delhi and Madhya Pradesh. The Adopt-a-Village programme aims to develop smart villages by planning initiatives on digitalisation, legal and consumer awareness, health and education, and has been conducted in the Rangiya district in Assam and Koba village in Gandhinagar.
- Artists' Adda: By organising open mic events, workshops and seminars, exhibitions, music nights and different competitions to bring out people's artistic capabilities and provide a platform to showcase art and culture, this initiative helps people explore, understand and know the artist within themselves.

- LexQuest Foundation: This is a non-profit think tank working in the field of law and policy, catering to the different sections of society. It provides capacity and skill-building workshops, policy advisory programmes, public outreach and stakeholder consultations, and assists the government and private organisations in formulating and executing impactful policies.
- LexADR: This is a platform to learn more about alternate dispute resolution, and helps foster this system in India.
- Acing CLAT: This organisation aims to provide students who want to sit for law entrance examinations, including the Common Law Admission Test (CLAT), the All India Law Entrance Test (AILET) and the Law School Admission Test (LSAT). They provide guidance through sample papers, test series, compendiums and blogs.

GNLU also supports the Clean India Mission across the campus, including all students, faculty and staff. This includes students having to dedicate at least 8 hours a semester towards a cleanliness drive at one of the university's adopted villages.

7 Analysis and Recommendations

Do a little good to someone everyday in your life. You need not be a big social reformer. (Justice D. Y. Chandrachud, Honourable Judge, Supreme Court of India, addressed students at the GNLU convocation in February 2020)

Educational institutions are the best platform to instil social responsibility in students, and NLUs in India are working to bridge the gap between education and social responsibility. Law institutes have often played a vital role in major social reforms. Beyond their primary contribution to society, which includes shaping legislation, judicial processes and policies, the Centres for Excellence have contributed to in research and awareness raising activities for the social transformation and upliftment of the larger society. NLUs have taken ahead the legacy of the ancient Indian education system, in terms of social responsibility. The work being done by the Centres of Excellence at NLUs across India is commendable, and compliments the objectives of the NLUs. However, while challenges do obstruct the way, at times, institutes should continue to function in order to imbibe social responsibility among students.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the GNLU Centre for Law and Society (GCLS) has been actively involved in coordinating with government authorities

to arrange transportation, food and shelter for the stranded migrant labourers. To date, GCLS has assisted over 6,000 workers (Legally India, 2020).

Students' involvement in activities carried out by the Centres has helped them develop a connection with the ground reality. It helps them apply and observe the theories in practices, and research helps them in their academic excellence. For example, to create and promote research in law and interdisciplinary studies, GNLU, through its Research and Publication division, provides internships to Student Research Associates (SRAs). The research internship enables students to work with the Dean of Research and Publication, along with the Centres of Excellence at the university, exposing them to the research being done at the university. Clinical legal education helps students learn to apply the law practically, in actual conditions, through participation in legal aid clinics and internships with lawyers, providing them with exposure to the courts. The Centres of Excellence stimulate students to fight against social issues and to make the public aware about the laws and their rights. It also builds them as leaders and mentors in the community. Therefore, NLUS work to provide students with a holistic education, imbuing in them not just knowledge, but also the values of social responsibility.

NLUS have now been established in almost all the states in India. These institutions, dispersed across the nation, and their Centres of Excellence, should now target their work to make an impact on society, including finding solutions to issues in the local, state-level contexts. For example, those NLUS working in states with a large tribal population should work on issues relating to tribes and migration. NLUS should also move towards working on educational reforms, especially in reference to competence-based education, climate change, local art and culture, health and well-being, social exclusion and inclusive policies, migration and refugees, tribal and indigenous issues and digitalisation, among others.

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