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Interview of Asst Prof Saurabh Siddhartha: NLU Before CLAT, Practical and Theoretical Learning

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Saurabh Siddhartha graduated from HNLU in 2010 then pursued LLM from Odisha. He joined ICFAI Law School Dehradun as an Asst. Professor in 2014. Currently, he is pursuing his PhD in Law and Medicine.

Tell us about your law school life at HNLU.

An ordinary person with high expectations. I was in fact a misfit in the legal field because I felt an inner calling to literature. I don't know why but law school life has been spent mostly through guiding and teaching my juniors & that interest I carried ahead in my LLM times too.

I was not interested in internships ever, maybe because I never aspired to be a lawyer or some associate in a law firm. I thoroughly enjoyed my law school times with few of my friends I still can count on.

Law school gave me a lot of time and diversity, a perspective on how to see the world in a mini setup. I happened to be interested in research works and proofreading. As happens with life, it does happen in a law school that you like some subjects and yet hate some.

I was not much into procedural laws but I found my love in Intellectual Property Rights, Pol Science etc. Apart from academics, I associated myself with travels within Chhattisgarh. HNLU is no different from any other law school because everywhere we find a variety of persons, their ambitions.

There too, it was very vocal that you need to prove yourself as goes with mostly everyone. One optimism is what you need, that was the crowd there, who listens to your poetry, strong opinions. Inspirations are short-lived if external, HNLU acted as a mirror to me, exactly showing where I was competent and where I was incompetent. I grew up in HNLU as my second home.

You were a part of a National Law School before CLAT came into existence, tell us about the entrance procedure and your experience.

In 2005, there were separate national level examinations conducted by respective Universities. I got 21st rank, downloaded the letter and went to the campus directly for admissions.

At that time, there were not many hassles as it is today. I would not say that the entrance was easy or difficult but it does test your metals, analytical ability, legal aptitude and all. I believe, studying systematically in line and length of the syllabus is more important than investing money on coaching. You have all digital materials ready in your smartphone.

What are the pros of pursuing LLM from India?

We have a colonial habit of praising others and underestimating ourselves. Be noted that Indian education system is far more enriched than any foreign curriculum. Though I agree that our system is towards jack of all trades and master of none, the legal thoughts in India always prove to be more brainstorming.

Pursuing LLM from India shall not bite your pocket much and secondly, it will help you because you have gone through Indian legal systems and concepts in your LL.B.

To be frank, no matter if you are the product of some foreign or domestic law school, you shall end up with one thing, that is need to explore more. Doing LLM from India shall keep your pace balanced and you shall have a range of choices and opportunities. It is not brand names that create you, you create the brand.

What are the shortcomings of Indian law schools?

Few things I have observed, one of them is that Indian Law Schools are excessively academic in character, much into theories with non-relatable significance to practical situations.

Whomsoever I met in court premises, emphasized on certain areas of practice which is untouched in law schools like Negotiable Instruments practice, certain land-related disputes or some service matters.

Law schools in India need to involve advocates, practitioners and should dedicate a substantial part of their curriculum to learn practice within walls of the school. That would serve the purpose of what a law school ought to be like.

Secondly, the integration of the Law Commission of India with law schools and encouragement to law students and academicians on similar footing can make students feel like part of the system

where their contributions do matter.

Law schools are parenting the students well, but it should be the duty of Law schools to inculcate earn and learn culture too.

Well! That would happen with active collaborations with law firms, undertaking projects, consultancies etc.

Lastly, the correct track may be the vibrant student exchange programs in India. Mobility of students should be appreciated. Ultimately, this is the concept of student welfare where a law school gives priority to the welfare of students more than the profits.

Profits can be earned by inculcating quality research articles in journals of universities, by patenting and other IPR related activities. Our Indian Legal Education needs to understand that skills matter more than degrees.

The dogmatic approach that, to be appointed as an Assistant Professor, you need to have PhD or NET leads to faculty who are great researchers but are not as good while delivering lectures.

See! NET is an objective test, theoretically, it should not be the criteria to determine if you can teach or not. Secondly, PhD is a degree related to research skills. PhD has nothing to do with teaching skills, though it is a criteria because supply is more than demand.

In my opinion & ***whatever I said is frankly my personal opinion***, there should be appointments based on real teaching skills, demos, and that too through a committee. Transparency and accountability shall be unquestionable in such selection criteria.

Tell us about your teaching experience, methodology. How do you engage students in the class?

Firstly, I don’t enter in a class as a teacher. I have reaffirmations in my mind that I will be interacting with rational beings who may have genuine doubts, opinions. I don’t behave with an ego that I know all, I talk with students about issues and the outside world which matches.

I don’t ask my students to mug up some notes or a bare act. I am there to assist them, to make them more inquisitive, hungry and capable to seek solutions on their own. If I happen to teach competition law, I will relate the subject with CCI orders and recent news, taking it to comparative study with developed and developing countries.

Then, I will relate this subject to other subjects and finally, how it is related to students too. We need to make connections to make the concept more lucid and interesting & of course, sense of humour must be there.

You are not taking the class in a graveyard, we need some debates in class too. If for an example, I am to teach about Jurists in the Jurisprudence class. Very simple! I would allot students, the personality of jurists.

Someone will be Paton, someone Salmond and like that. This practice can continue for five days and then I may organize a debate on some topic. Everyone shall be defending their personality and thought.

This is not merely an experimental learning process, it is actually rational learning. We cannot learn by heart unless it reaches to the heart.

What are your views on theoretical and practical learning in law schools?

Theoretical learning is important but not as an objective. It is just a part of it. Practical learning must continue simultaneously.

Which subjects do you teach? How do you equip your students to make a career in those areas?

I am into Intellectual Property Rights, Medical law, Drafting & Pleading, Competition Law & Jurisprudence.

I don’t give false hopes of scopes, it really depends on the student, his own goals in life, set of skills a student has. To summarize, IPR can make you a good subject expert, Trademark Attorney, Patent Attorney, Medical Law can lead you to practice in injury cases, a trend in the US is that of Injury Law Firms.

My way to motivate my students is to organize three-tier workshops. There, in workshops, my focus is not much on the lecture of experts but groups of students discussing a problem or drafting a document.

Tell us about your experience as a student of PhD. While being a teacher, how do you bring out the student in you?

PhD appreciates my interest in research and learning new dimensions of my research area, which is healthcare in my case. I allocate some time for my self-study when my children sleep, late hours of course. I collect research related articles from my university and work on that. It's twenty-four hours of student's life.

What is your biggest learning as an Asst. Prof at a law school?

How to unlearn and relearn.

What is your experience as a teacher in the COVID era?

I am not a tech-savvy but I do enjoy exploring new gadgets, apps etc. These helped me a lot communicating with my young learners, zoom or Webex etc. I enjoyed thoroughly while taking classes regularly on these platforms. This lockdown and COVID 19 made me a bit more talkative and interactive. Though I am lazier than before, I blame it on lockdown times, I still know that I need to join a gym,if possible.

What is your biggest advice for your students for a successful career in law?

Stop studying success stories, books, corporate mantras. These all are marketing gimmicks. Buddha used to say that there is no need to follow me, you will not become Buddha. You have your own path.

Never follow anyone in your life. You are a rational human being, evolved one. Success is a relative term, ***it is a rat race where the winner is a rat too***.

Love your passion.

Parting message for our readers.

You have read me, that is me. I am not important, nor is my message or grammatical error. You may have got the impression that I am not writing anything but speaking directly to you.

We spend much of our life in feeling important or desire to be important. We spend unnecessarily much part of life in pleasing people, flattering for success. Ultimately, what matters is how you stand in front of the mirror.

If you can see yourself, identify with your own consciousness and the work you are doing, that shall make you realize, You truly exist.