BLOGS

In Conversation with Dr. Pallab Das, Founding Dean and Associate Professor of Law, Centurion University of Technology and Management

Ruchika Mohapatra · 10 May 2023

In this interview, Dr. Pallab Das, Founding Dean and Associate Professor of Law, Centurion University talks about his journey from being a law student to finding his passion in the field of academics and how he'd like to bring about reforms in the way law is being taught today by emphasizing on students learning through clinical programs and skill-based experiences in his law school.



Please tell us a bit about yourself.

I am Dr. Pallab Das, the Founding Dean of Centurion University [School of Law]. I completed my undergraduate degree from ILS Pune. Thereafter, I qualified for the OJS Exam and obtained the 5th rank in the state. While working as a member of the judicial services, I got an opportunity to pursue LLM from Swansea University, UK with a scholarship and it was then that I put down my papers and decided to pursue higher education.

I completed my LLM from Swansea University on an International Excellence Scholarship (2015) with a specialization in International Commercial and Maritime Law. I then went on to complete my Ph.D. in Maritime Arbitration from NLUO and I have been teaching for almost 9 years now. Presently, I am working as the Dean of Centurion University, Bhubaneshwar.

What motivated you to pursue law as a career?

There are several reasons why I pursued law. To be honest, I am someone who is very empathetic as a person. I have always wanted to provide solutions to people when they faced any issues and I saw law as an empowering field that would allow me to enable people to make changes from the grassroots level.

To be able to shape the minds of students, to be able to lay down the foundations of legal brilliance in students is something that I realized I wanted to do. Besides, the law is everywhere! From renting houses to taking international vacations, everything is entangled with the law in a way.

Another reason that influenced me to pursue law was the words of people I looked up to like Mr. Ram Jethamalani, Hon’ble Justice Chandrachud, Hon’ble Justice Leila Seth, and Hon’ble Justice Krishna Iyer- Reading their words left an indelible mark on me and motivated me to do something for the society. I also felt like my core skills and personality were more suited to law in general and legal education in particular.

How was your experience at ILS, Pune? Do you see a difference in how traditional law colleges and NLUs approach academics?

When I was gearing up to enter law during my UG days, there weren’t many NLUs and neither were people all that aware of courses like integrated law. Studying in a traditional university as opposed to an NLU was definitely different then; however, I am not sure if such vast differences

exist today.

A major difference can be seen in the way colleges are run- in traditional universities, the administration runs everything whereas, in NLUs, there are many, many student committees giving a larger and more directional voice to students. This is the first difference, speaking from my own experience.

The second difference I would say is the way students are kept academically involved throughout the year in NLUs versus in a traditional university, where students have a lot more time to develop themselves in other areas. The culture of research was not huge when I was at ILS; however, things have changed today.

You said you had a lot of free time to pursue different things while at ILS, Pune. On that note, would you like to talk about your experience there?

In ILS, our classes used to get over by 10 AM and that gave me ample time to pursue other interests like writing, researching, theatre, etc. Since Pune is known as the Oxford of the East and the university had a huge campus, there was a lot to explore. My experience there was fun-filled and extremely stress-free.

Would you say that a similar schedule should be followed by law schools across the nation to be able to provide students with the time to develop wholistically?

I believe that classes should not go on beyond 2 PM and the students should be allowed ample time to figure out and pursue their passion and take up anything that they have set their mind on after completing their undergraduate courses. Having classes from 9-5 will end up closing the mind of the children.

There needs to be time for them to exercise their minds outside the classroom while giving equal emphasis to the academic curriculum. If the colleges wish to carry on classes beyond 2 PM, I strongly believe these should be clinical and skill-based classes.

You cleared Odisha Judicial Services with a very good rank. What brought about the shift in your interest from judicial services to academics?

This is not known to many people, but in my initial days out of law school, I tried to teach in schools so as to be able to pursue my interest in teaching. I took up the chance to pursue my LLM abroad as I could see that it had a higher chance of opening up the door towards academics.

I am absolutely meant for and very passionate about the field of academics. I truly believe that I have found my calling.

Can you tell us about your experience of pursuing LLM from Swansea University, UK?

I would recommend that every law student who has completed their UG in India, if their financial situation so permits or if they can get a scholarship, attempt to pursue their LLM abroad. The idea is to be able to learn survival skills in a foreign land while broadening the horizon of your education constantly.

I was studying, working, and trying to earn enough to be able to pay my dorm fees. It was a life-changing experience to be amongst intellectually-challenging peers while learning how to survive in a totally different country.

Moving out of your comfort zone will force you to learn more, learn faster, and experience a lot more in a short span of time. I believe the experience made me tougher, more humble, and more empathetic while adding substantially to my knowledge of the law.

You have been awarded ‘Elite under 35’ by the Indian Law Conclave in 2020 for your contribution to the field of law. You have also been awarded the ‘Excellence in Academic: Maritime Legal Award’ by GMU-Marex 2022. But most recently, you’ve been appointed as the Founding Dean and Associate Professor

of Law at Centurion University! Can you please tell us a bit about that?

I think it is by the grace of God and the belief of several people that I could start a Law school from scratch that I got this opportunity. I would like to extend my gratitude to Captain Vikas Patra [Director of Maritime School, Centurion University], the President- Dr. Mukti Mishra, and Dr. Supriya Pattnaik [Vice Chancellor, Centurion University] who found the spark in me towards legal education and gave me this amazing opportunity to start a school and lay down the foundation of legal education in the minds of young scholars.

I was apprehensive about my ability before taking up the position. Clearing an exam to be appointed to a particular position is easier than actually staying in the position and being able to do absolute justice to it.

But the fact that I had this opportunity and I had so many people believing in me, and supporting me, made me realize that I needed to take this opportunity to bring about the changes that I'd been thinking about for a long time.

You've been associated with academics for close to a decade and that must have given you a great insight into what's missing or what are the things that we need to inculcate in the way law is being taught. Do you have any such ideas that you'd like to share with us?

Centurion University is the only university that is an MSME and Government of India-recognized skill-based university in Odisha. We are starting this law school with the sole vision of inclusivity and skillfulness. We are planning to have disputes resolved in our moot courtroom so as to give the students an experience of how disputes are resolved in real-life scenarios.

The students would be the ones assisting the authorities and legal professionals in the case and will benefit immensely from such exposure. Our ideas are currently in the pipeline of setting up a skill-based law school and we are looking forward to being able to provide the students with the exposure, skills, and training required for all-round development.

With regard to the way the law is being taught, I have identified certain gaps that I would like to fill to the best of my ability and to the point that the BCI allows me to do. I would actually like to propose a 4+1 curriculum where the students have 4 years of classroom experience and 1 year of skill-oriented or experience-based teaching.

I believe that we should invite practitioners, arbitrators, and, policy-makers to come and teach the students how to practice what they've learned in law school so far.

Think of it as the mandatory internship that medical students have to undertake- if law students were to be given a similar opportunity, it would bring about a major change in their skill level.

This is just an idea that I have and I'm not sure how far this can work out in the near future but I am hopeful of reform in the way law is being taught today.

Another change that I would like to suggest is that academicians should be allowed to practice. Now the UGC allows academicians to work as consultants; however, I do believe that academicians should be allowed to practice, join the higher judiciary and use the classroom experience they have in different ways.

Note: This interview is part of a series of interviews where we publish the stories of impactful law students and legal professionals. If you're interested in sharing your story, please click here!