BLOGS

In Conversation with Aaratrika Bhaumik (NLUO), Senior Sub-Editor at The Hindu

Ruchika Mohapatra · 30 Jun 2023

In this conversation with CLATalogue, Aaratrika Bhaumik talks about her law school experience at NLUO and the life beyond law school as a senior Sub-Editor at The Hindu.



Tell us a bit about yourself.

Hello! My name is Aaratrika Bhaumik. I graduated from National Law University Odisha, Cuttack (NLUO) in the year 2021. I hail from the city of joy-Kolkata. I am currently working as a Senior Sub-Editor with The Hindu. I can usually be found curled up with a book during my free time. I prefer reading fiction because it makes for a good escape from the drudgery of daily life.

How did you start your CLAT journey?

I come from a family of doctors. So naturally there was an expectation that I would pursue medicine as well. However, I was always far more inclined towards social sciences and global politics. So taking CLAT to pursue law was actually a rebellious decision much to the chagrin of my parents.

I participated in a number of Model United Nations (MUNs) during my school days which really piqued my interest in law especially international law and policy. I also resonated with the idea of using advocacy to further access to justice especially in a country like ours where there is such blatant disparity in distribution of resources.

I did a crash-course with a coaching centre a couple of months before CLAT which was very helpful. Striking a balance between preparing for my Class XII board examinations along with other competitive law entrances was quite a task.

What really helped me was taking as many mock tests as I could. With constant practice, my speed and accuracy increased manifold and it also helped me grow more confident. I was elated when I qualified for NLUO- a journey that has been extremely rewarding.

How were your initial years in law school?

To be honest being thrown into such a challenging environment right after school was quite daunting initially. But with time I settled in and was determined to make the most of the world of opportunities that NLUO has to offer.

I participated in a number of debate and moot court competitions and was also a part of a number of college committees. Being surrounded by peers who hail from different corners of the country provided me with a lot perspective and also made me challenge a lot of my own unconscious bias – an attribute of national law schools that help you grow into a more well-rounded individual.

Preparing for international moot court competitions also helped me develop some very essential life skills – the most important of them being that one must not get too swayed away either by success or failure. I strongly believe that students must see these co curricular activities not as mere credentials on their resumes but as character-building exercises.

I would specifically like to highlight the wonderful time I had preparing for the Willem C. Vis International Commercial Arbitration Moot (Hong Kong). The moot provided me with the opportunity to interact with law students, faculty and professionals from all across the globe

which was truly an incredible experience.

How did your legal education at NLUO contribute to your career in legal journalism?

Most of my learnings in law school have actually been beyond the classroom. I spent a lot of my time engaged in readings beyond the prescribed academic curriculum whether it was preparing for moots on niche subject matters or for debate competitions.

In fact, preparing for debates allowed me to engage in readings on a host of non-legal subjects that ultimately helped me appreciate the intersectionality of our legal system. This was crucial in developing an interest in writing on topics that trace the impact that verdicts of our courts have on existing power structures.

Moots also helped me augment my research skills which is essential in the field of journalism. Our academic curriculum also consisted of subjects such as Law and Language, Law and Literature, Organisational Behaviour, Sociology of Social Transformation among others that really equip you to pursue a career in legal journalism.

I would specifically like to mention how having a subject like Interpretation of Statutes in my law school curriculum really helped me break down legalese for an audience beyond the legal fraternity.

What motivated you to pursue a career in legal journalism after studying law?

I actually had no clue that I would end up pursuing legal journalism. Throughout my law school I had actually envisioned myself pursuing a career in litigation. But unfortunately I graduated in the middle of the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic as a result of which none of my litigation internships eventually worked out.

I always enjoyed writing and thought of applying to Live Law for a position of a legal correspondent. As luck would have it, they were looking for a Calcutta High Court correspondent and I ended up getting the job.

As clichéd as it may sound – I automatically fell in love with the highs and lows that come with being a court reporter and there has been no turning back ever since. But in hindsight, I think my passion for writing and the vision to empower the general public with knowledge about our often inaccessible legal system were fundamental in inculcating an interest in legal journalism.

Could you discuss any challenges you have encountered while reporting on legal matters and how you overcame them?

I think for me the biggest challenge has been to simplify complex judgements for the general public that too at a breakneck speed. Judgments often run up to pages and can include a hyper-technical vocabulary.

But with time one learns to quickly skim through a judgment and separate the operative portions from the obiter-dicta. I make it a point to make my parents read my copies before I file them for publication to gauge whether they are easily comprehensible even for people who have no formal legal training.

Another challenge which most legal journalists face is reporting on courtroom exchanges especially live-tweeting them. Oral remarks made by judges especially in politically sensitive cases if provided without context can often be misconceived so one has to be very careful and objective in such situations.

How do you ensure that complex legal concepts are communicated effectively to your audience? Do you have any strategies for simplifying legal jargon or making legal topics more accessible?

I think the only way to ensure that you get better at any form of writing is to read more. I follow the work of some esteemed journalists and also have subscriptions to international publications. It is important to read as much as possible to understand technique and observe unique writing styles.

There is also a common misconception that good writing always encompasses a more nuanced vocabulary which is not always true – the aim should be to use simple language that offer more clarity instead of obscure words.

When it comes to making legal topics more accessible I always make it a point to prioritise writing on topics that impact the day-to day lives of people. I personally believe that legal journalism has democratised our courtrooms so the endeavour has always been to increase the accessibility of an institution that is so crucial to our democracy.

What advice would you give to law students or aspiring legal journalists who are interested in pursuing a similar career path?

Don't confine yourself to readings and activities in law school that are conventionally perceived to guarantee a so called flourishing career in law. Explore as many diverse experiences and opportunities as possible in order to enhance your worldview which in turn will make you a far more intuitive journalist. Nurture a curious mind – it will help you appreciate the ambiguities in law better.

Most importantly, develop a reading habit. Not only will it help you improve your vocabulary but will also encourage critical thinking. Even though it is implied, write more frequently even if it is just one paragraph daily. I would also encourage aspirants to intern at a media house at least once to get the feel of what a hustling newsroom looks like and grasp its varied demands.

This interview is a part of our series #MyCLATStory where we interview law students and legal professionals.

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