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Legal Education: Affordability with Quality beyond Borders in times of Pandemic

Rule of law binds us together. Even when the pandemic of COVID-19 has severely paralyzed the human kind and the world, it is the rule of law that has been preserving human rights of millions of helpless people. Some were struggling for food, others were fighting for healthcare, and many were fighting poverty and livelihood. And millions of students across the world were worried to reclaim their education facilities. Legal education was equally hit.

In such critical times, we started ‘Virtual Law School (VLS)’ a first of its kind law teaching platform in India because without effective lawyers we cannot envision the protection of the rule of law. When most law school were shutdown in India from March 22 due to the national lockdown, VLS started law classes from April 27, 2020. Its aim was to ensure that every law student especially who do not get admitted to top law schools due to financial or geographical barriers gets to continue legal education.

This is because very few top law schools had technological infrastructure in the beginning to combat the shutting down of law schools and providing for online law classes. Hence, VLS emerged as an innovative platform complimenting legal education in times of crisis. VLS was established by law teachers and is not a degree giving institution. During the times of national lockdown, VLS has taught 580 law students on a completely Pro Bono basis. This included 6 weeks of Pro Bono Law Teaching- 5 hours per day, 6 days a week at par with any standard law school in the country. And gradually, VLS has launched a new version of law classes called ‘Low Bono Law Classes’ charging a minimal fee of INR 750 (approx. USD 10) per student per law subject for 3 months of law teaching. All teachers teach completely pro bono at VLS.

It started with support of former judges of the Supreme Court of India, Senior Counsels and Senior Law Professors of legal academia in India. It caters to all law students and offers completely free law classes to all students who are either physically disabled or belong to Economically Weaker Section according to government certification. To start this initiative, the Founder & Director of VLS gave up handsome salaried job of a Dean of a law school in April 2020 and since then has been using own savings to teach law students in India and has been supporting VLS from own financial savings. The paper and presentation will discuss the condition of legal education in India, how it was affected by pandemic, contribution made by VLS and its future plans as it will complete its 1st anniversary in April 2021.