

# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR LEGAL RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS



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# AI Tools In Legal Practice: Risks, Ethics & Professional Standards

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## **ABSTRACT**

The way legal services are provided, studied, and administered has completely changed as a result of the introduction of artificial intelligence (AI) into the Indian legal system. Although artificial intelligence (AI) presents previously unheard-of benefits, including superior case analysis, quicker legal research, and greater efficiency, it also poses significant ethical questions about the expanding application of AI in Indian legal practice and critically assesses its effects on fundamental professional duties as defined by the Bar Council of India. Based on international best practices and judicial viewpoints, the paper highlights significant shortcomings in India's present regulatory framework and makes the case for the urgent need to create ethical standards tailored to AI, changes to legal education, and a legal tech certification system. The article's conclusion states that although artificial intelligence (AI) has the potential to greatly improve legal practice, its application needs to be strictly regulated in order to preserve the independence, integrity, and equity of the Indian judicial system.

## **Introduction**

In recent years, the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) has brought about a subtle but significant change in the Indian legal profession. How attorneys, judges, and clients interact with the law is starting to change as a result of technological integration, from research platforms that provide predictive case law analytics to AI-assisted drafting tools and virtual legal assistants. These developments create urgent questions regarding the professional duties and ethical limits of attorneys, even while they also hold forth the prospect of increased accessibility and efficiency.

The Indian judicial system, which is based on custom and is subject to stringent professional behavior standards, is currently at a turning point. As legal workflows increasingly use AI techniques, the following queries come up: Is it ethical for a lawyer to trust advice from AI? In the event that AI generates biased or incorrect results, who bears the blame? How should client data<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> **Client Data** means all data or records of whatever nature in whatever form relating to the Client, its operations, facilities, assets, employees, students or otherwise relating to its business, whether subsisting at the date of this Agreement, or created or processed in connection with the Services or as provided by the Client to the Supplier in connection with the Services. Client Data shall include all Client Personal Data.

and confidentiality be managed in a time where clever algorithms process information on a regular basis?

This paper investigates the relationship between artificial intelligence (AI)<sup>2</sup> and legal ethics<sup>3</sup> in India, critically analyzing how the swift uptake of technology is posing a threat to traditional professional obligations. Additionally, it emphasizes how urgently a legislative framework is needed to direct the legal community's ethical use of AI before innovation surpasses integrity

## **Overview of AI in the Legal Profession**

The Indian legal system is no longer in the dark about artificial intelligence. Law firms, courtrooms, and even law schools have gradually begun to use it. Artificial intelligence (AI) in law mostly serves as a tool to supplement human judgment, not to replace it. Because of its reliance on precedents, papers, and extensive research, the legal profession is especially well-suited for this kind of technical advancement.

. AI-based systems are being used more and more by Indian attorneys and law firms nowadays for duties like document evaluation, legal research, contract drafting, and even case outcome prediction. Tools that make it easier for lawyers to access rulings include SCC Online's clever filters and Manupatra's AI-powered search engine. International resources such as Westlaw and LexisNexis have also impacted Indian legal practice with clever features like case mapping and citation analysis. Beyond research, AI is helping to automate documents so that attorneys may quickly create typical contracts or petitions. Even AI-based due diligence technologies are being investigated by some companies to expedite corporate tasks.

The Indian judiciary has also adopted technology, which is noteworthy. In addition to using AI to translate rulings into local languages, the Supreme Court is investigating how machine learning might improve case classification and listing. These changes represent advancement, but they also herald a complicated interplay between machine logic and human reasoning in the practice of law. Although the advantages are indisputable, so are the ensuing moral conundrums, particularly with regard to responsibility, accuracy, and professional ethics.

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<sup>2</sup> **Artificial intelligence (AI)** is the theory and development of computer systems capable of performing tasks that historically required human intelligence, such as recognizing speech, making decisions, and identifying patterns. AI is an umbrella term that encompasses a wide variety of technologies, including machine learning, deep learning, and natural language processing (NLP).

<sup>3</sup> **Legal ethics** are the moral principles and codes of professional conduct that govern the behavior of lawyers, judges, and other legal professionals, aiming to ensure honesty, integrity, fairness, and competence in their dealings with clients, the courts, and the public. These guidelines cover duties such as maintaining confidentiality, avoiding conflicts of interest, and upholding the justice system, and violations can lead to disciplinary action like disbarment.

## **Core Ethical Duties of Lawyers in India**

A profession built on trust and subject to high ethical standards, the legal field offers more than just services. In India, the Advocates Act of 1961 and the Bar Council of India rules serve as the main guidelines for advocates' professional obligations. These regulations make sure that attorneys are held to the highest standards of responsibility, promote justice, and safeguard their clients' interests.

### **1. The obligation of confidentiality**

The protection of client confidentiality is one of the most essential responsibilities of an advocate<sup>4</sup>. Lawyers are required to keep all information disclosed by their clients completely confidential, unless disclosure is permitted by law or required by law. Breaching this trust can significantly undermine a client's legal standing and damage public confidence in the profession.

### **2. The Obligation of Competence and Care**

Attorneys must represent their clients competently. This entails being thorough, well-prepared, and informed on recent legal changes. In cases that are delicate or complicated, this obligation may be broken by carelessness, a lack of legal knowledge, or an excessive dependence on unreliable sources.

### **3. The obligation to be independent and honest**

An advocate must behave independently, morally, and without interference from other forces. This guarantees that choices made while being represented by counsel are impartial, equitable, and in the interests of justice.

### **4. Obligation to Prevent Conflicts of Interest**

Attorneys are supposed to stay away from circumstances in which their prior affiliations or personal interests could compromise their capacity to fairly represent a client. It is a major ethical transgression to represent opposing parties or provide client information without permission.

### **5. Duty Toward the Court and Society**

In addition to helping clients, advocates also have a larger duty to protect the court's dignity and foster public trust in the legal system. These ethical obligations are being tested as AI starts to take on roles that have historically been handled by humans. While tools that automate research or draft documents may expedite the process, they cannot take the place of a lawyer's duty to verify, validate, and act morally.

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<sup>4</sup>**Advocate** means an advocate whose name has been entered in the State roll prepared and maintained by a State Bar Council under section 17 of the Advocates Act, 1961 (25 of 1961) and who is a member of a State Bar Association or State Advocates' Association.

## **Ethical Challenges Posed by AI**

Even though artificial intelligence has many benefits for the legal industry, its application raises a number of difficult ethical issues that traditional professional codes were never intended to handle. As AI tools become more sophisticated, it becomes harder to distinguish between help and over-reliance, raising important issues regarding accountability, integrity, and client protection.

### **1. Confidentiality and Data Privacy<sup>5</sup> Risks**

Numerous artificial intelligence tools function on cloud-based infrastructures or necessitate the input of sensitive client information to produce outcomes. Should this data be processed or retained by external systems, there exists a substantial risk of data breaches or misuse. Legal practitioners employing AI without a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms by which the tool manages data may inadvertently jeopardize client confidentiality, a fundamental obligation under the ethical guidelines established in India.

### **2. Reliability and Accountability**

Although AI systems can be very effective, they are not perfect. Tools that have been trained on partial, out-of-date, or biased data may generate false or deceptive results, and using these outputs to draft legal opinions or court filings can have detrimental effects.

### **3. Discrimination and Bias in AI Algorithms**

Biases in training data are frequently reflected in AI tools. AI may unwittingly perpetuate prejudices in its suggestions if previous court rulings or legal documents represent structural injustices based on caste, gender, or socioeconomic background. This undercuts the attorney's obligation to seek justice and behave impartially.

### **4. Professional Competence Diluting**

Over-reliance on AI runs the risk of eroding fundamental legal knowledge. Without knowing the legal justification, young attorneys in particular risk becoming reliant on research or drafting tools. This could impair the human judgment that is essential in interpreting the law and the level of professional competence that the Bar Council of India requires.

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<sup>5</sup> **Data privacy** refers to an individual's ability to control their personal information, determining when, how, and to what extent it is collected, stored, used, and shared. It is a component of data governance, focusing on individual rights and involving practices like obtaining consent, protecting data from misuse, and adhering to data protection regulations such as the GDPR. While distinct from data security (which focuses on protecting data from unauthorized access), data privacy uses security measures to protect sensitive information and uphold individual rights.

## 5. Openness and the capacity to explain

The majority of AI technologies function as "black boxes," producing results without providing a clear explanation of how they were arrived at. This lack of transparency presents an ethical conundrum for legal experts. It is expected of a lawyer to justify any advice or action they take on behalf of a client. This obligation could be broken by depending on instruments that are unable to support their recommendations.

## A Gap Analysis of AI and the Indian Legal System

India currently lacks a clear legislative or regulatory framework to control the ethical use of artificial intelligence by attorneys, despite the technology's increasing application in the practice of law. For professionals who wish to use new tools but are unclear about how to do so safely without breaking current regulations, this gap causes ambiguity.

### 1. Legal Practice Does Not Have AI-Specific Guidelines

As of now, no official guidelines pertaining to the moral application of AI in legal services have been released by the Bar Council of India (BCI) or other regulating organizations. Issues like AI-driven legal research, client data storage on third-party platforms, or reliance on machine-generated advice are not addressed by the current regulations under the Advocates Act, 1961 and the BCI Rules, which place more emphasis on traditional behavior like preserving confidentiality, avoiding advertisements, or upholding the dignity of the court.

### 2. Insufficient Explicitness Regarding Liability and Accountability

Liability law is currently unclear when an AI tool gives inaccurate or deceptive information that results in professional negligence. Without regulations, judges could have to make these decisions on an individual basis, which could result in uneven results.

### 3. Issues with Client Confidentiality and Data Protection<sup>6</sup>

The state of data protection in India is still developing. Although it is a positive beginning, the Digital Personal Data Protection Act of 2023 does not yet include comprehensive guidelines on how attorneys should handle private client data when utilizing AI systems. There is an urgent need to make sure that the usage of AI tools conforms with privacy rules while retaining professional secrecy because many of them rely on cloud-based models.

### 4. Adoption by the Courts Without Official Protections

It is interesting to note that Indian courts have started experimenting with AI. For example, the Supreme Court has started using machine learning to translate judgments. However, there are no established technical protections or ethical norms to control this kind of use, which raises

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<sup>6</sup> Data protection is the process of safeguarding sensitive information from corruption, loss, and unauthorized access through security strategies, policies, and technologies. It involves protecting data throughout its lifecycle to ensure its availability, integrity, and privacy, while also complying with regulations like GDPR. This includes measures like data backups, encryption, and disaster recovery plans to protect against data breaches, corruption, or accidental loss.

questions about fairness, consistency, and possible abuse of AI-generated insights in court decisions.

## **5. Evaluation in Light of Global Developments<sup>7</sup>**

This gap has already been addressed by other countries. The European Union's AI Act, for example, suggests enforceable rules on high-risk AI systems, including those used in legal decision-making, while the American Bar Association (ABA) has released ethics judgments on the responsible use of AI. These worldwide patterns emphasize how urgent it is for Indian regulatory agencies to catch up and offer precise instructions.

### **The necessity of regulatory and ethical reforms**

There is an urgent need for India to modernize its ethical and regulatory framework as AI becomes more integrated into legal practice. Even though AI has many advantages, such as speed, efficiency, and accessibility, its unrestrained use carries hazards that could undermine the fundamental principles of legal integrity. Because there are no clear rules, attorneys are unsure of how to employ AI technologies in an ethical manner, and clients are at risk of injury if those tools are abused.

#### **1. Developing Guidelines for Legal Professionals Particular to AI**

The Bar Council of India ought to think about establishing a specific code of conduct for attorneys using AI. These rules need to cover things like: The responsibility to examine and validate AI-generated material Guidelines for safeguarding customer information while utilizing AI tools The significance of telling clients about AI use when it's appropriate

#### **2. Including Ethics in AI in Legal Education**

AI and legal ethics should be covered in law school and bar training courses. In addition to learning how to use AI tools, aspiring attorneys also need to learn how to assess their dependability, identify bias, and guarantee justice. In a changing legal environment, education is essential to preserving professional competence.

#### **3. Developing Legal Technology Certification and Vetting Systems**

The use of AI technologies in Indian legal practice is not yet subject to any regulatory authority that certifies or audits them. Legal digital platforms can be vetted by a committee of

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<sup>7</sup> Global development is the process of improving the quality of life worldwide, especially in regions facing challenges. It is a broad concept economic growth, poverty reduction, and human development, including improvements in healthcare, education, and human rights. The goal is to create a more sustainable and equitable world for everyone.

technical and legal experts to make sure they adhere to basic requirements for accountability, accuracy, and data privacy.

#### **4. Revising the BCI<sup>8</sup> Regulations and Advocates Act**

To take into account the realities of digital practice, the Advocates Act of 1961 and the Bar Council of India Rules ought to be revised. In addition to AI, this covers more general topics including digital evidence, online client communication, and remote hearings. In the era of artificial intelligence, a modernized legal system will better safeguard litigants and attorneys.

#### **5. Encouraging Innovation That Is Responsible**

Rather than being afraid of technology, the legal community ought to accept AI responsibly. Fostering collaborations between legal experts and technology developers can aid in the development of effective, morally sound, and specialized tools for Indian legal requirements.

## **Breach of Data Privacy Case in India: Cases, Impact & Legal Gaps**

In recent years, major data breaches in India have exposed personal information, including confidential and financial information of millions of its citizens. This underlined the urgent need for better data protection laws and stronger cybersecurity measures. Given below are some of the more serious data privacy breaches that have occurred in India.

### **1. K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2018) Aadhaar Data Breach<sup>9</sup>**

The Aadhaar, India's unique identification, has witnessed several security breaches. In 2018, it was reported by The Tribune that access to Aadhaar details consisting of names, addresses, phone numbers, and Aadhaar number, was available for Rs 500 on the dark web. Some unauthorized people accessed the Aadhaar database in an unauthorized way using a government portal. They hacked into the vulnerabilities of the system, which enabled them to extract and download private information of Aadhaar cardholders. The data breach was so critical that even the biometric data got compromised, increasing risks of identity theft. 1.1 billion Indians had their personal data leaked. The hacking created an issue regarding national security issues and violations of privacy. UIDAI claimed no breach occurred, but still followed up with enhanced security features

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<sup>8</sup> BCI stands for the Bar Council of India, a statutory body that regulates legal education and the legal profession in India. It was established by the Advocates Act, 1961, and its functions include setting standards for professional conduct, exercising disciplinary jurisdiction over lawyers, approving universities for legal education, and inspecting law colleges.

<sup>9</sup> Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd) v. Union of India 2019 (1) SCC 1

like virtual IDs. In this case Supreme Court ruling that upheld the Aadhaar Act's constitutionality, but with significant limitations on its use and strong emphasis on privacy safeguards. The court ruled that Aadhaar is a valid tool for government benefits, particularly for marginalized communities, but declared its use non-mandatory for areas like education and held that privacy protections are paramount for the data collected. This followed the 2017 Puttaswamy v. Union of India judgment, which established the right to privacy as a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Constitution. The Supreme Court upheld the Aadhaar Act as constitutionally valid, stating it empowers marginalized people by improving access to government subsidies and benefits. Aadhaar for government benefits: The court ruled that the use of Aadhaar for availing any government benefit or subsidy is mandatory. The court made the use of Aadhaar non-mandatory for specific purposes, such as for those aged 6-14 years for education admission in Karnataka. The ruling stressed the need for strong privacy safeguards for all personal data collected under the Aadhaar program. The Court dismissed arguments that a trade-off between privacy and welfare was necessary, holding that the right to privacy is a fundamental right for all individuals, irrespective of their socio-economic status.

## 2. Pegasus Spyware Scandal (2021)<sup>10</sup>

### (Manohar Lal Sharma v Union of India)<sup>11</sup>

The Pegasus spyware scandal made headlines in 2021 for reports of Indian government officials alleged to have deployed Israeli spyware on journalists, activists, and politicians. Pegasus spyware is one developed by Israel's NSO Group as military-grade spyware used for phone hacking. Through this spyware, one would be able to read messages and record calls besides gaining remote control over cameras and microphones installed on phones. Targets were prominent political figures, lawyers, and human rights workers. It created a new debate on digital privacy and unauthorised surveillance . The apex court of India asked for an independent probe into the case. The controversy widely voiced global concern over the misuse of spyware against civilians. The Court will decide whether there must be an investigation into the Government of India's alleged use of Pegasus spyware on journalists, activists and public officials. The Court, after ascertaining if the Union government had used the Pegasus spyware, will decide the limits the government must adhere to while surveilling people

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<sup>10</sup> **July 18, 2021:** A global collaborative investigative project revealed that Israeli company NSO Group's Pegasus spyware targeted over 300 mobile phone numbers in India including that of two serving ministers in the Narendra Modi government, three Opposition leaders, one constitutional authority, several journalists and business persons. The Wire reported that the database included at least 300 phone numbers of human rights activists, lawyers, journalists, politicians, and dissidents from across the country.

<sup>11</sup> **Case Number WP(Crl)314/2021** Last Hearing Date 16/07/2025

### 3. Star Health Insurance Data Leak (2024)<sup>12</sup>

#### M/S. Star Health and Allied Insurance V/S M/S. Telegram Messenger Inc<sup>13</sup>

The suit was filed for a declaration that the hacking and unauthorised accessing of the confidential, sensitive and personal information of the plaintiff, its customers, employees and business activities is illegal and for consequential injunctive relief in relation thereto. At the beginning of 2024, hackers leaked customer data from Star Health, an Indian leading health insurance company. Attackers used Telegram chatbots to share policyholder data consisting of medical history, contact details and financial information. Reports suggested that insiders too could have been stakeholders in the hack. Data was being auctioned in black market websites. Million customers were at the risk of fraud and their identity fraud. This breach exposed loopholes in India's health data security infrastructure. Star Health filed a case against Telegram and enhanced its security. In July 2025, the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) imposed a penalty of ₹3.39 crore on Star Health Insurance for violations of information and cybersecurity guidelines related to a data breach that occurred in late 2024.

The legal proceedings regarding the data breach and the hacker's actions are ongoing, with a Madras High Court case resulting in an order for platforms like Telegram to remove the leaked data. There has not been a single final "case judgment" that resolves all aspects of the incident and associated lawsuits as of November 2025.

### 4. Policybazaar Data Breach (2022)<sup>14</sup>

The online insurance aggregator, Policybazaar, suffered a data breach in July 2022, exposing sensitive personal details of its customers. A bug in Policybazaar's IT systems facilitated hacking into the site from the unauthorized side. Customers' personal information, including email addresses, PAN numbers, and insurance details, were compromised. More than 50 million users have been affected. The breach sounded warning alarms regarding the cybersecurity risks plaguing India's fintech sector. Policybazaar informed the authorities and strengthened security measures.

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<sup>12</sup> **Star Health Insurance**, one of India's largest health insurers, allegedly suffered a significant data breach, compromising sensitive personal and insurance details of over 31 million customers. The hacker, reportedly named xenZen, claims to have accessed 7.24TB of data, offering it for sale online for \$150,000. Smaller batches of 100,000 records are reportedly listed at \$10,000 each.

<sup>13</sup> Madras High Court ,14 July 2025

<sup>14</sup> PB Fintech, Policybazaar's parent company, reported a data breach on July 19, 2022 when certain vulnerabilities in a part of Policybazaar Insurance Brokers Private Limited's (Policybazaar) IT systems were subjected to illegal and unauthorized access. The online insurance distributor disclosed the breach on July 24, 2022, claiming that no significant customer data was compromised after the information security team, along with external advisors, reviewed the issue.

## 5. Cambridge Analytica's India Connection<sup>15</sup>

The data scandal that originated from Cambridge Analytica extended to India as well. The firm was accused of accessing Indian citizens' data on Facebook and altering the course of election campaigns. Cambridge Analytica harvested the data of the users on Facebook unilaterally. Reports claimed that it collaborated with Indian political parties for more targeted election campaigns. The exact claims suggested that this data was used to alter voter behavior. Data of millions of Indian users on Facebook was compromised. The scandal had exposed the exploitation of digital platforms for political motives. It led to scrutiny over data protection laws in India.

### Regulatory Gaps of Data Privacy Laws in India

India did not have strong data privacy laws despite these events. In 2019, the Personal Data Protection (PDP) Bill was first put forward. The Personal Data Protection bill was first introduced in 2019 and calls for stricter rules on how to collect, process, and store data.

The Indian government, on August 11, 2023, released the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 (DPDP Act). This law will protect personal data and set rules for its use in India. A lot of rules have been put in place by the DPDP Act about how to collect, process, store, and send digital personal data. But the government needs to take more steps to make the DPDP Act work. These include publishing the parts of the DPDP Act that make it work, getting rid of the Privacy Rules, and publishing the rules and regulations that are needed to make the DPDP Act work. Only personal data that is stored digitally is covered by the DPDP Act.

#### Challenges:

**Lacks Clear Regulations:** Noting that India continues to operate under outdated IT laws unlike EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

**Weak Cyber Infrastructure:** Most organizations do not invest in strong security systems, and hackers find it easy to penetrate.

**Government Surveillance:** Cases like Pegasus have revealed how state agencies misuse digital tools for mass surveillance.

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<sup>15</sup> Cambridge Analytica, the controversial UK political consultancy, claims on its website that it worked on the Bihar assembly elections in 2010, and its clients won a landslide victory.

**Delayed Data Protection Bill:** Without proper laws, companies and individuals are still vulnerable to data breaches.

## Conclusion

AI's emergence in the legal field represents a turning moment in ethics as well as technology. AI presents a significant opportunity to boost productivity, advance legal research, and increase access to justice in India, where the legal system already faces difficulties such as case backlogs and restricted access to legal resources. But new instruments can also exacerbate already-existing disparities, undermine client confidence, and undermine the fundamentals of legal accountability if they lack a strong ethical and regulatory basis.

In India, lawyers have responsibilities that extend beyond serving clients; they are also stewards of justice, equity, and privacy. These responsibilities need to change to handle new dangers when AI starts to help (and occasionally influence) their judgments.

India needs to take action now. To establish a framework that strikes a balance between innovation and accountability, regulatory agencies, legal education institutions, courts, and legal tech innovators must collaborate. AI may help professionals, advance justice, and fortify the legal system if implemented properly. Yet, if unchecked, it would jeopardize the fundamental principles upon which the legal profession is based.

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