



DUTY IN ACTION: PROFESSIONAL ETHICS OF LAWYERS IN LEGAL AID

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ABSTRACT

The legal profession is one of the noblest professions which helps in ensuring justice. The ethics of one in his profession help in gaining the same. The difference between “obligation” and “action” is the core of this research paper. Mainly about how these duties can be brought into action and help others in attaining justice. In the present era, we can only see duties that are maintained but never brought into action. This study, titled “From Obligation to Action: A Study on the Professional Ethics of Lawyers in Ensuring Legal Aid and Justice”, seeks to examine the role of professional ethics in ensuring access to justice through legal aid. The paper mainly concentrates on how the difference between “obligation” to “action” can be put into practice. It also suggests how to improve the institutional lessons and encourage advocates to adhere to professional ethics and standards.

Keywords: Professional Ethics, Obligation to Action, Legal Aid.

PROFESSIONAL ETHICS IN LEGAL AID

Professional ethics are essential to the efficient provision of legal aid since they guarantee that social and economic limits will not restrict access to justice. Article 39A of the Indian Constitution and supported by statutes like the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, will have real meaning only if an advocate takes it as an ethical duty. Lawyers protect the rule of law, promote social justice, and maintain the dignity of the legal profession by following professional ethics. It strengthens public confidence in the justice system, balances the growing commercialisation of legal practice, and guarantees that marginalised individuals receive fair and competent representation. The judiciary has consistently reinforced this ethical dimension through landmark rulings. The Supreme Court ruled in *Hussainara Khatoun v. Home Secretary*,

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State of Bihar¹ that undertrial prisoners who could not afford legal representation must be given professional counsel at the State's expense, recognising that legal aid is a constitutional right under Article 21. The Court highlighted that legal aid is not charity but rather a necessary component of a fair trial by emphasising that magistrates should assign advocates to indigent prisoners. Similarly, the Court ruled in *M.H. Hoskot v. State of Maharashtra*² that at any time a person's life or freedom is in threat, free legal services are required by the Constitution. It was decided that to guarantee justice, the courts must provide qualified counsel at the expense of the State if the accused is indigent or otherwise unable to obtain legal representation. These rulings highlight how constitutional requirements and professional ethics come together to give advocates and the government an enforceable obligation to offer legal help.³ Thus, maintaining the integrity and dignity of the legal profession as well as making sure that the most vulnerable members of society experience equal justice, as promised by the Constitution, are the two main reasons why professional ethics in legal assistance are so important. Advocates are reminded by professional ethics that their responsibility extends beyond merely representing paying clients, but it also includes serving as a guardian of justice for people who are unable to defend themselves. The constitutional vision under Articles 21 and 39A is given actual significance when advocates fulfil their ethical obligation to provide legal aid, guaranteeing that rights are not only theoretical but also practically accessible. Furthermore, lawyers strengthen public confidence in the legal system and contribute to closing the gap between the written and applied laws by contributing their time and expertise to the needy. Legal practice is thus transformed into a tool of equality and justice through the professional ethics of legal aid, which serve as a link between social justice and constitutional values.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL ETHICS AND LEGAL AID

Failing to uphold ethical obligations in legal aid can damage public trust and give the impression that only the wealthy can obtain justice. Professional ethics and legal aid are mutually reinforcing, forming two sides of the same coin in the pursuit of justice. As officials of the court dedicated to justice, integrity, and service to society, ethics provide the moral framework that directs advocates to see beyond financial concerns. In response, legal assistance becomes the most practical and useful expression of this moral obligation, guaranteeing that

¹ *Hussainara Khatoon v. Home Secretary, State of Bihar*, (1980) 1 SCC 98

² *M.H. Hoskot v. State of Maharashtra*, (1981) 1 SCC 627

³ Ms Abhiruchi Kumari, 'Analysis of 10 Landmark Judgments on Free Legal Aid' (Justice Alive) <https://justicealive.org/legal-aid/analysis-of-landmark-sc-judgments-legal-aid/> accessed 1 September 2025

even the most underprivileged individuals can obtain skilled legal counsel and a fair trial. Both of these terms are interconnected in the sense that an advocate with professional ethics can only provide legal aid to those who need it. Not just constitutional provisions or rules are required to give legal aid to people who are really in need of it, but also advocates who are willing to give free legal aid to people who are not capable of affording the same.

DUTIES OF LAWYERS

The duties of lawyers are broadly classified into duties towards the court, duties towards the client, and duties in relation to the handling of the client's property and funds. Since the independence of the judiciary is the foundation of justice, an advocate is expected to uphold dignity, self-respect, and professionalism in court. He must abstain from unfair practices, refrain from trying to influence court decisions through improper means, and treat the court and opposing counsel with dignity. The advocate must wear appropriate court attire and refrain from appearing in cases involving close family members or in which he has a financial or personal stake.

An advocate has an obligation to clients to accept requests unless there are exceptional circumstances that warrant a refusal, and he is not permitted to suddenly conclude engagements without a good reason or adequate notice. He has to stay clear of conflicts of interest, fully disclose any relationships that may bias his judgment, and bravely and fairly defend the client's position. A prosecutor must make sure that justice is served and that innocence is not suppressed, while a lawyer must defend the accused in criminal cases regardless of one's personal beliefs about guilt.

Lawyers are expected to be completely honest and transparent when dealing with their clients' money and property. They are not allowed to buy properties involved in their clients' cases, traffic in claims, or abuse their fiduciary position to take advantage of their clients. Advocates are required to promptly notify clients of receipts made on their behalf, maintain accurate records of all client funds, and strictly avoid misappropriation. Unspent funds must be reimbursed upon case completion or engagement termination, and excess funds must be reimbursed in cases where advances were obtained. At any point, the client is entitled to request a copy of the account.

CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK OF LEGAL AID IN INDIA

Article 14: Equality Before Law: Article 14 guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of laws. No one shall be unlawfully discriminated against or denied equality in legal protection, according to this fundamental right of the Constitution. Article 14's definition of equality, however, must be interpreted as substantive equality rather than just formal equality. In societies with significant economic and social divides, formal equality, which treats everyone equally, frequently feeds inequality. However, substantive equality necessitates preventative measures to guarantee that underprivileged groups can access justice on an equal basis with the privileged.

Legal aid serves as one such positive measure, ensuring that Article 14's promise of equality is not limited to those who can afford competent legal representation. For example, the idea of equal protection under the law is made meaningless if two litigants appear in court, one of whom has a capable legal team and the other cannot afford any legal representation. Legal aid fills this gap by giving underprivileged people the means to stand up for their rights.

Also, India's dedication to ensuring that everyone has equal access to justice is consistent with global norms. Legal aid is not only a right in and of itself, but also a necessary assurance of equality before the law and a fair trial, according to the United Nations Principles and Guidelines on Access to Legal Aid in Criminal Justice Systems (2012).⁴ India affirms that access to justice is a necessary component of human rights by bringing Article 14 into compliance with these international norms. In order to ensure that the ideal of equality is achieved in reality and is not limited to paper guarantees, Article 14 offers the philosophical basis of legal aid.

Article 21: Right To Life and Personal Liberty: According to Article 21 of the Constitution, no one may be deprived of their life or personal freedom unless a prescribed process is followed. This provision has been interpreted by judges to encompass both the right to physical existence and the right to a dignified life. The understanding that a fair trial is an integral component of the right to life and that free legal aid is an essential requirement for such fairness

⁴ United Nations General Assembly, 'United Nations Principles and Guidelines on Access to Legal Aid in Criminal Justice Systems' https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/UN_principles_and_guidlines_on_access_to_legal_aid.pdf accessed 2 September 2025

is at the basis of this expansion. Therefore, Article 21 legal aid guarantees that poverty or hardship won't stand in the way of justice.

In *M.H. Hoskot v. State of Maharashtra*, (1981) 1 SCC 627,⁵ the Supreme Court ruled that Article 21's guarantee of fair, just, and reasonable procedure implicitly includes the right to free legal aid at the State's expense for an accused person who cannot afford legal representation. The Court ruled that the State's constitutional obligation to provide legal aid to the disadvantaged is not a matter of charity. The concept was further supported in *Hussainara Khatoon v. State of Bihar*,⁶ (1980) 1 SCC 98, where the Court held that free legal services are essential to ensuring equal justice for all after interpreting Article 21 in light of Article 39A.

These court rulings have strengthened Article 21 as India's constitutional foundation for free legal aid. It guarantees that poverty alone cannot deny someone their right to life and liberty and that all accused people, regardless of their financial situation, have the right to a fair trial protected by strong legal representation.⁷

Article 22(1): Right of the Accused: According to Article 22(1) of the Constitution, no one who is arrested is denied the opportunity to speak with and be represented by an advocate of their choice. The provision which acknowledges that a person's liberty and fundamental rights are in danger the moment they are arrested is an essential safeguard in the criminal justice system. At this point, having legal counsel is essential rather than optional because the accused is frequently unaware of the legal system, liable to threats, and at risk of unjust treatment. The provision reflects the framers' understanding that to protect people from abuse of state power, justice necessitates both procedural and substantive guarantees.

However, if the accused's financial ability were the only factor determining its exercise, this constitutional guarantee would remain meaningless. Only the wealthy would truly benefit from the right to legal representation, while the poor and disadvantaged, who constitute a majority of criminal defendants in India, would be essentially excluded. Since fundamental rights must be equally applicable to everyone due to their universality, Article 22(1) must be interpreted to

⁵ *M.H. Hoskot v. State of Maharashtra*, (1981) 1 SCC 627

⁶ *Hussainara Khatoon v. Home Secretary, State of Bihar*, (1980) 1 S.C.C. 98

⁷ Dr Sarabjit Kaur, 'Access to Justice and Legal Aid in India (Statutory and Case Laws)' in *Judicial Process and Administration* <https://ebooks.inflibnet.ac.in/lawp02/chapter/access-to-justice-and-legal-aid-in-india-statutory-and-case-laws/>, accessed 4 September 2025

guarantee representation for the poor as well. When interpreting Article 22(1), the judiciary has placed emphasis on this universality principle.

The Supreme Court held in *Suk Das v. Union Territory of Arunachal Pradesh*.⁸ (1986) 2 SCC 401, that an economically disadvantaged accused person's trial is undermined and rendered invalid if legal aid is not given. The Court stated that trial courts have a duty to guarantee that no one faces criminal prosecution without qualified legal representation and that the accused cannot be held accountable for their ignorance of their right to legal aid. This decision upheld the rule that, in situations where the accused cannot afford legal representation, legal aid is required and not optional.⁹

Article 39A: Directive Principle of State Policy: The most explicit constitutional obligation for legal aid is found in Article 39A, which was added by the 42nd Amendment in 1976. In order to guarantee that no citizen is denied the chance to obtain justice because of financial or other limitations, it instructs the State to "provide free legal aid by suitable legislation or schemes." Article 39A is non-justiciable since it falls under the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSPs), in contrast to Articles 14, 21, and 22(1). However, it has substantive strength because the judiciary has regularly interpreted it in relation to the Fundamental Rights, especially Articles 14 and 21.

OBLIGATION OF LAWYERS IN PROVIDING LEGAL AID

In India, providing legal aid is both a constitutional right and an ethical obligation placed on lawyers. Upholding justice, equity, and equality values that are strongly linked to the idea of professional ethics, the responsibility is placed on advocates in their capacity as court officers. Thus, the duty to offer legal aid is the result of the union of two strong ideals: the ethical duty of lawyers to assist those who need it and the constitutional guarantee of equal justice. Lawyers must act as guardians of justice for society as a whole and put professional ethics above their own interests. This duty is enshrined in the Bar Council of India Rules (Part VI, Chapter II), which require all advocates to provide pro bono legal assistance to the disadvantaged when necessary. This obligation reflects the understanding that legal representation is not a luxury but a necessity for the effective exercise of fundamental rights. Thus, when a lawyer undertakes

⁸ *Suk Das v. Union Territory of Arunachal Pradesh*, (1986) 2 SCC 401

⁹ "*Khatri v. State of Bihar*" (LawBhoomi) <https://lawbhoomi.com/khatri-vs-state-of-bihar/> accessed 4 September 2025

a legal aid case, it is not an act of charity but a fulfilment of both professional and constitutional obligations.

Every advocate has the right to charge for their services because the law is their source of income, but the profession also has an ethical duty to help those who are truly in need for free. This duty is defined in the Standards of Professional Conduct and Etiquette (Part VI of the Bar Council of India Rules), which state that: "Every advocate shall in the practice of the profession of law bear in mind that anyone genuinely in need of a lawyer is entitled to legal assistance even though he cannot pay for it fully or adequately and that free legal assistance to the indigent and oppressed is one of the highest obligations an advocate owes to society within the limits of an advocate's economic condition." This principle makes it clear that providing free services is not a mere act of charity, but a professional and ethical obligation.

It is important to distinguish between statutory legal aid and pro bono legal services. The development of a strong pro bono movement has been limited by low public awareness and a lack of institutional incentives for lawyers. However, pro bono work is becoming more well-known in some fields, and some organisations and practitioners are stepping up to cover the gaps left by the official system. When carried out properly, pro bono work can help a lawyer and client develop a respectful and trustworthy relationship. Pro bono representation frequently indicates an intentional choice by the advocate to serve the community, in contrast to statutory legal aid, which is occasionally handled randomly by advocates. The same standards of confidentiality, diligence, and professional responsibility are upheld by ethical advocates who take on pro bono and paid cases alike. Pro bono services thus stand as one of the best examples of professional ethics, reinforcing the legal profession's function as a defender of justice and an instrument for social change.¹⁰

The critical issue lies in the translation of obligation into action. Many lawyers disregard legal aid cases in spite of their ethical duty. A culture where such cases are viewed as a burden rather than a duty has been influenced by inadequate compensation, a lack of institutional support, and the belief that providing free legal aid is "inferior work." The integrity of the legal profession is directly threatened by the divide between duty and action. The promise of legal

¹⁰ 'Role of Advocate in Legal Aid Mechanism' JusCorpus (1 August 2024) <https://www.juscorpus.com/role-of-advocate-in-legal-aid-mechanism/> accessed 4 September 2025.

aid will remain unmet if the lawyers, who are supposed to represent the ideals of justice and equity, disregard their ethical obligations.

In addition, the entire legal system is significantly impacted by the gap between duty and practice. The poorest and most marginalised members of society are usually the ones who have to receive legal aid, but they are the ones who cannot afford private legal representation and who are solely dependent on the efficiency of services provided by the state. These groups are deprived of representation, equality before the law, and dignity when lawyers fail to fulfil their obligations. In this context, the constitutional vision embodied in Articles 14, 21, 22(1), and 39A is weakened when advocates fail to uphold their professional ethics, which reduces public confidence in the judiciary and the legal profession.

While the Bar Council of India Rules and court rulings clearly outline the professional and ethical duties of lawyers, putting these duties into consistent practice is the true challenge. Only when ethical standards are actively applied in advocates' daily behaviour do they have any real meaning. To guarantee that disadvantaged clients receive knowledgeable and respectable representation, lawyers handling legal aid cases must approach them with the same seriousness and preparation as those handling privately paid briefs. More accountability, better oversight, and a change in professional culture that recognises pro bono and legal aid work as essential to the legal profession's identity are all necessary to accomplish this.

PRACTICE OF LAW: WHETHER A BUSINESS

Legal practice is regarded as a noble profession rather than a business. Anybody can buy and sell goods or services as part of a business, which is primarily motivated by the desire to make money. On the other hand, the legal field necessitates specific training, education, and moral accountability. Advocates serve as defenders of justice and liberty, and the practice of law is intimately related to the administration of justice. A lawyer works to maintain justice, not to make money, and unlike business, there is no such thing as "loss" in the legal profession—only the provision of services for payment. The Bar Council of India Rules make it clear that practising law should not be viewed as something profitable.

The foundation of business operations is the idea of profit and loss. However, such ideas have no place in the practice of law. A lawyer provides professional and intellectual services rather than engaging in the trading of goods or commodities. Even service fees are not comparable to the cost of goods; their purpose is to support the profession rather than to make it more

profitable. Under the Advocates Act of 1961, the Bar Council of India Rules specifically warn that practising law should never be viewed as a means of making money. The fundamental idea is that the legal profession serves society by guaranteeing equal access to the legal system and the defence of constitutional rights.

When considering this distinction from the perspective of social responsibility, its significance increases. Some businesses, like those that deal in alcohol, tobacco, or environmentally harmful products, may have limited commercial interests or even be harmful to society. On the other hand, maintaining social welfare, justice, and peace are fundamental goals of the legal profession. It puts lawyers in a morally challenging position where they have to decide on the client's interests against those of the justice system and society at large.

The distinction is also found in competition and ethics. In the business sector, monopolies, dishonest tactics, and bribery are common outcomes of competition. However, in the legal profession, professional behaviour is strictly regulated by the duty to the court, ethics, and etiquette. An advocate cannot use commercial techniques to attract clients or advertise services like a businessperson. Their reputation is based on their competence, honesty, and commitment to justice. From an institutional perspective, company law, partnership law, and other commercial laws govern businesses. However, the Bar Council of India, an independent organisation that oversees the legal profession, establishes rules for professional behaviour, conduct, and disciplinary procedures. These frameworks guarantee that the profession upholds its honour and operates as a public service rather than a trade.

Moreover, advocates are expressly prohibited from conducting their own business. Lawyers may continue to serve as sleeping partners in businesses that do not compromise the honour of the profession, but Rule 47 of the Bar Council of India Rules forbids them from engaging in any business activity directly. In the same way, Rule 50 allows an advocate to inherit a family business but prohibits them from taking on active management duties. These limitations prove that, in order to protect the integrity of the legal profession, even indirect business interactions are strictly regulated.

This idea has also been firmly upheld by the judiciary. The Supreme Court noted in *Bar Council of Maharashtra v. M.V. Dabholkar*¹¹ that "the Bar is a public institution committed to public justice; it is not a private association, like that of barbers, butchers, and candlestick makers."

¹¹ *Bar Council of Maharashtra v. M.V. Dabholkar*, AIR 1998 SC 242)

This declaration makes it abundantly evident that the law cannot be boiled down to commercial guild-like practices. In a similar way, renowned jurist M.C. Chagla highlighted that the legal profession is a liberal calling rather than a trade, with financial gain never being the main goal. He emphasised that the practice of law is a profession of service, not profit, and explained that the true goal of advocacy is a duty to society and to fellow humans.

The practice of law is essentially a trust that the State and society place in its advocates. Instead of serving as vendors of legal services, lawyers are supposed to be pillars of justice. Treating the profession like a business would undermine the constitutional guarantee of equality before the law, decrease public trust in the legal system, and reduce advocacy to simple mediation. Therefore, the legal profession thrives on ethics, integrity, and a dedication to justice, values that elevate it beyond commerce into the realm of public service, whereas businesses thrive on capital and competition.¹²

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The central theme of this research has been the transformation of professional ethics in the legal profession from obligation to action. India has a solid constitutional and statutory basis for legal aid, as demonstrated in the previous chapters, especially through Article 39A of the Constitution and the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987. However, a concerning gap still exists between advocates stated commitments and their real actions in spite of these provisions. All too frequently, legal aid is minimised to a formal obligation or something routine that advocates recognise but do not actively pursue in their work lives. The gap shows how the existing framework has failed to advance past the obligation stage, denying vulnerable groups in society efficient access to the legal system.

IMPLEMENTING TECHNOLOGY TO PROVIDE LEGAL ASSISTANCE

Technology has made everything possible in the current era, and it is one of the developing areas that can be used anywhere. Implementing technology to provide legal assistance will help in promoting faster proceedings and also help advocates. Advocates can consult with clients remotely through virtual legal aid clinics that are accessible via video conferencing platforms. NALSA-developed mobile applications could offer details on local legal aid providers' contact information, available programs, and legal rights. Artificial intelligence can be used to

¹² Dr S R Myneni, *Professional Ethics, Accountancy for Lawyers and Bench-Bar Relation* (1st edn, Asia Law House) 48–50

prioritise cases, provide initial legal advice, and ensure that attorneys concentrate on more complicated issues. In particular, artificial intelligence (AI) presents a number of chances to improve the effectiveness, accessibility, and inclusivity of the provision of legal services. India's legal aid system can overcome its present constraints of administrative backlogs and a lack of personnel by implementing AI-based solutions, which will enable it to offer more responsive services to those in need. Adopting AI-powered legal research tools is an essential strategy that helps practitioners process an immense quantity of legal data accurately and quickly.

PROMOTING PUBLIC AWARENESS AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Even when they are entitled to free legal services, marginalised people frequently avoid approaching authorities due to a lack of legal literacy. It is necessary to start long-term public awareness campaigns to address this.

Using regional languages and culturally relevant techniques like street plays and community workshops, legal literacy camps ought to be set up in schools, villages, and urban slums. To guarantee grassroots penetration, collaborations with panchayats, self-help organisations, and non-governmental organisations would be necessary. Media campaigns on social media, radio, and television can raise awareness even more. Participation from the community is equally important. Teachers, social workers, and local leaders should be enlisted as agents who can direct people to legal aid organisations. Demand for legal aid services will rise as awareness spreads at the local level, generating bottom-up pressure that guarantees lawyers and organisations carry out their responsibilities.

Including legal literacy in the current government welfare programs would be another successful strategy. To guarantee that information reaches the very communities that need it most, legal aid awareness sessions, for example, can be held combined with health camps, workshops on women's empowerment, or skill development programs. Authorities can cut costs and increase outreach by integrating legal education into platforms that already have a high level of community participation. This multi-sectoral strategy guarantees that legal aid awareness is addressed as a component of the larger development agenda rather than in an empty space.

TRAINING FOR LAWYERS

The conceptual shifts occurring in law and legal practice must also be reflected in the framework of legal education. Lawyers must interact with international standards and comparative legal systems more and more as a result of globalisation, digital transformation, and growing cross-border interactions. The current system needs to change to incorporate interdisciplinary learning, exposure to international law, and research and innovation skills. It still mainly relies on traditional doctrinal training. To address the complex issues of delivering justice, there is a genuine need for innovative and ground-breaking scholarship that can produce new insights and concepts. Professional development institutional mechanisms are still in their early stages. Even though the Advocates Act of 1961 gave Bar Councils authority over the regulation and training of lawyers, local Bar Associations were mainly assigned to handle this task, and while their efforts are important, they are frequently inconsistent and irregular. The Act was amended in 1974 to give Bar Councils more authority to organise seminars, publish journals, and create guidelines for lawyers' behaviour. However, ongoing education is still not a standard and essential aspect of the field. Because of this gap, even though India has produced some very good lawyers, the system as a whole has had difficulty upholding uniform professional standards across various geographical areas.

The difficulty of execution, not a lack of vision, is the task at a glance. With seriousness and dedication, the reforms that have been suggested time and time again must be put into effect. To produce professionals who are not only technically proficient but also socially conscious, morally oriented, and globally aware, legal education should be redesigned. Legal professionals who can defend civil and human rights, oppose arbitrariness, and make a significant contribution to democratic governance will be produced with the aid of an innovative educational and training framework.

Councils, laws, and policy proposals have already marked the path to reform. What's left is the resolve to work continuously and strongly toward these reforms. In India, legal education has the potential to become a dynamic, justice-focused, and socially responsive system that upholds the rule of law and the promise of constitutional democracy if this momentum is sustained.¹³

¹³ J P S Sirohi, *Professional Ethics, Accountancy for Lawyers & Bench Bar Relations* (6th edn, Allahabad Law Agency) 153–155.

FROM OBLIGATION TO ACTION: INTEGRATING ETHICS INTO LEGAL PRACTICE

The necessity of a fundamental change in professional consciousness is at the core of all reforms. Legal aid must be viewed as an ethical obligation that has an unbreakable connection to the advocacy role, not as a selfless deed done for convenience. Lawyers hold a special place in the legal system, are given the sole right to appear in court, and are tasked with protecting people's rights. There are responsibilities that go along with this privilege, chief among them being the duty to make sure that those who cannot afford justice are not denied it. Therefore, in order to move from obligation to action, lawyers must embrace the notion that legal aid is essential to the profession's very identity and is not an optional option.

Advocates must start rethinking their roles beyond individual representation to undergo this change. Upholding the common goal of equality before the law is at the core of every case a lawyer takes on, in addition to defending the rights of individual clients. In order to maintain the legitimacy of the legal system by guaranteeing inclusivity, advocates are involved in a larger social mission. In addition to helping one individual, lawyers who volunteer their services for people in need are upholding the constitutional guarantee that justice belongs to all citizens, not just the wealthy and powerful. Legal aid thus becomes a democratic necessity as well as a professional obligation.

Ethical duties must be inherent in routine legal work to put this way of thinking into action. Structured pro bono services, mentoring of junior lawyers in legal aid clinics, and active community involvement through awareness campaigns are some examples of this. By incorporating these commitments into their everyday practices, lawyers make sure that ethics is a living aspect of their work rather than being limited to textbooks or random lectures. Advocates who continuously exhibit honesty, openness, and service set the bar high.

CONCLUSION

This study emphasises that legal aid in India must move beyond being just a constitutional promise to a lived reality through active professional commitment. The title *From Obligation to Action* reflects this idea that legal aid can only be recognised as a right when it is consistently delivered by lawyers, institutions, and the legal system as a whole. A recurring theme in this work is that such change is rooted in the professional ethics of lawyers. Their role extends beyond representing clients, being officers of the court, protectors of justice, and defenders of

the public interest. Legal aid, therefore, should not be seen as charity but as a core ethical duty of the legal profession.

For this vision to take shape, systemic reforms are also essential. Bar Councils must establish strong mechanisms for oversight and accountability to ensure that advocates fulfil their legal aid responsibilities in practice. Both financial and non-financial incentives should be structured so that lawyers view legal aid not as a burden but as a meaningful and rewarding part of their career. Legal education, too, must shift from a purely theoretical approach to a more hands-on model. Community service, pro bono initiatives, and legal aid clinics should be integrated into the curriculum to prepare future lawyers for their professional responsibilities. Strengthening NALSA and its associated bodies will also require adequate funding, digital tools, specialised units for vulnerable groups, and partnerships with NGOs and universities. The shift from duty to action can only be put into practice by ensuring that legal aid is not only promised in law but delivered in practice.