

22nd Convocation – NALSAR Hyderabad

**Justice B.R. Gavai,
Chief Justice of India**

1. Sri A. Revanth Reddy, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Telangana; Justice P.S. Narasimha, Judge, Supreme Court of India;

Justice Sujoy Paul, Acting Chief Justice, High Court for the State of Telangana & Chancellor, NALSAR;

Prof. Srikrishna Dev Rao, Vice-Chancellor, NALSAR;

Distinguished guests;

Faculty members;

Parents, and dear graduating students

2. Thank you for inviting me to the 22nd Convocation of NALSAR University of Law, Hyderabad. Since its founding in 1998, NALSAR has carved a distinct and influential place for itself — not just in India, but across South Asia — as one of the leading institutions for legal education and scholarship.

3. What sets this University apart is not only its academic rigour, but its commitment to the spirit of law. The Vice-Chancellor shared with me how the University nurtures this spirit through its vibrant ecosystem of research and engagement, from centres focusing on disability rights, gender justice, and tribal rights, to those exploring law and technology, climate change, and constitutional governance.

4. The success of this approach is visible in the journeys of your alumni. Many of them have gone on to become designated Senior Advocates in the High Court of Telangana and the Supreme Court of India. Others are pioneering legal academics, public policy leaders, social justice lawyers, and internationally recognised research scholars. Dear graduating students, today, you don't just receive a degree. You are becoming part of a living tradition of impact and integrity.

5. This is a day of celebration, not just for you, but for your families, your teachers, and for the many people whose sacrifices and silent labour made your journey possible.

6. I offer you my heartfelt congratulations.

7. Convocations are supposed to be grand. Full of wise words and best wishes. But today, allow me to offer something else: not grand wisdom from the mountaintop, but a conversation. Let me share few thoughts with realism and practicality.

8. The legal profession is many things. It is noble. It is important. But, it is never easy. Never. There is no straight path to the profession. There are no guaranteed returns. This profession demands that you constantly prove yourself: to the court, to your client, to your peers, and often, to yourself. It demands. And it keeps demanding.

9. You will be measured constantly, not just by judges and clients, but often by your own inner voice. You will question your path. You will be questioned. You will be overlooked. You will feel invisible. And yet, you will keep showing up. Because that's what law demands: your presence, your persistence, your belief. In those moments you will also find flashes of clarity, purpose, and meaning.

10. The journey of a lawyer has been aptly described by Thomas Grant, who wrote a book titled *"The Mandela Brief: Sydney Kentridge and the Trials of Apartheid"*, published in 2024. The book deals with the cases fought by Sydney Kentridge against Apartheid in South Africa, including the treason trial of Nelson Mandela and the other leading members of the African National Congress. Grant wrote, and I quote:

"Life as a barrister is arduous. It requires constant application and concentration. There are moments of stress, anxiety, even dread. It involves sacrifice of the evenings and weekends... Being an effective advocate requires not just stamina but nimbleness; every relevant fact in the case must be there at the forefront of your mind; every document must be at your fingertips." (end quote)

11. Let me speak now of something we rarely speak of in such grand ceremonies: mental health. This profession can be isolating and emotionally taxing. The hours are long. The expectations, high. The culture, sometimes ruthless. You will feel pressure not just to succeed, but to appear successful.

12. Many hide their struggles. I urge you not to. Find your community. As celebrated author, Bell Hooks, wrote, *"Rarely, if ever, are any of us healed in isolation. Healing is an act of communion."* So I urge you: Share your fears. Furthermore, as Audre Lorde once said, *"Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare."* In this profession, self-care is not a luxury. It is a strategy.

13. But even mental health cannot be spoken of without recognising the structural barriers that exist in our profession. Structural inequality hides in silence. In the subtle comments. In the internship that never comes. In the doors that are hard to open.

14. Let me quote a study here. In the United States, leading law professors conducted a joint study analyzing the careers of lawyers for over twenty years. Now published as a book titled *"The Making of Lawyers' Careers: Inequality and Opportunity in the American Legal Profession"* in 2023, it reveals, and I quote: *"Where lawyers begin in practice is significantly influenced by law school attended. And where lawyers begin their careers heavily shapes their later career paths."* (end quote)

15. This is also true for the current trends in India after the inception of globalization. A student from a National Law School in a metro city may be seen as "better placed" than one from a smaller university, not necessarily because of skill, but because of perception. This is unfair. But it is real. We need to confront it, not accept it. As Malcolm Gladwell reminds us, *"Who we are cannot be separated from where we are from."* And yet, the profession often tries to separate the two.

16. But two things can keep young students from any college on a forward path in this struggle. The first is being grounded in the basics of law and being consistent in learning. Many of you will enter litigation, others academia, the corporate world, public policy, judicial services, or civil society. Wherever you go, remember this: there is no shortcut to knowing the law. There is no alternative to knowing the basics well. The Constitution, the Contract Act, the Code of Civil Procedure, the criminal law, and other core subjects are not

optional subjects. They are your daily bread. They are what allow you to argue with clarity, to advise with confidence, to teach with conviction, and to serve with integrity.

17. At the same time, the law is changing fast, with new emerging areas like artificial intelligence and data privacy. Of course, be cognizant of these latest developments. But keep your foundations strong. Because in the legal profession, the strongest minds are not those that chase every trend, but those who can explain a fundamental concept with clarity, precision, and insight, even years after law school.

18. You don't need to be everywhere. You need to be solid where you are. Have faith in yourself. As Martin Luther King Jr. said, and I quote, "*Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase.*" (end quote)

19. The second thing to be kept in mind is mentorship. To learn from the experience of others, who have been there before you. In a profession as demanding as the law, mentorship can be a game-changer. Not everything can be found in books or judgments. Some lessons are passed on in conversation, in encouragement, in the gentle correction of a first draft, or in the reassurance after a difficult day in court.

20. Let me say this with honesty: I am here today not just because I worked hard. Yes, effort mattered. But so did the fact that someone opened a door for me. Someone saw something in me before I could see it in myself. That act of belief, of support, of sharing wisdom changed my life.

21. And so, I appeal to all the seniors in this room— lawyers, judges, professors, professionals— be that person. Be the one who writes a recommendation, who explains a case, who tells a young graduate that they belong even when the room says otherwise. Mentorship is not a favour. It is a responsibility.

22. And to the graduates, seek mentors not for their power, but for their integrity. And one day, become mentors yourselves. That is how we build not just careers, but a community of care within the profession, one that uplifts, not one that intimidates.

23. Let me now speak of a sensitive subject: the pressure to pursue a master's degree abroad. It has become a symbol. A brand. A passport to validation.

24. If you wish to go — go. It broadens your horizons. It teaches you how the world thinks. But please, go with scholarship and funding. Go with purpose. Not pressure. I see young graduates or lawyers taking loans of 50 to 70 lakhs for this. Do not put yourself or your family under the burden of loans amounting to 50–70 lakhs just for a foreign degree. A foreign degree alone is not a stamp of your worth. Don't take this decision in a reflex of thought or under peer pressure. What happens next? Years of debt. Anxiety. Career decisions made under financial burden. Do not mistake urgency for progress.

25. 50-70 lakhs is a big amount. In fact, a small portion of it can be used as an investment to start your independent practice or build a chamber. And later, when you are stable, go abroad for studies. There is no age bar to learn. Go abroad not to escape, but to expand. As Kahlil Gibran once wrote, "*Work is love made visible.*" So, love your work enough to build it before you brand it.

26. I also feel that this growing trend of going abroad also reflects a structural issue: it signals a lack of confidence in the state of post-graduate legal education and research in our own country. We must ask: Why do so many feel they have to cross oceans to find intellectual stimulation, academic mentorship, or a meaningful platform for their research?

27. Furthermore, it is not that talent does not want to return. Many who study abroad come back with renewed passion and fresh perspectives. But when they return, they often find our institutions unwelcoming, under-resourced, or closed to new ideas. There are few structured pathways for post-doctoral research, limited funding for early career scholars, and opaque hiring processes that discourage even the most committed.

28. This must change. If we want to keep our best minds, or bring them back, we must build nurturing academic environments, offer transparent and merit-based opportunities, and most importantly, restore dignity and purpose to legal research and teaching in India.

29. It is not just enough to celebrate India's legal legacy. We must invest in its future. And that future depends on how we treat our researchers, our young faculty and lawyers, our returning scholars. We need to invest not only in institutions but in imagination, in mentorship programmes, research fellowships, policy labs, local innovation ecosystems, and ethical workplaces that make our best minds want to stay, or return.

30. This is also important because our country and our legal system are facing unique challenges. Delays in trials can sometimes go for decades. We have seen cases where someone has been found innocent, after spending years in jail as an undertrial. Our best talent can help us resolve the problems that we are facing. To borrow the words of Jed S. Rakoff, a senior federal district judge in the United States from his book *Why the Innocent Plead Guilty and the Guilty Go Free: And Other Paradoxes of Our Broken Legal System*: "even though I conclude that our legal system is in bad need of fixing, I remain cautiously optimistic that my fellow [citizens] will rise to the challenge."

31. Before I conclude, let me offer you my final words of advice, not as a Chief Guest, but as a guardian. Never ignore the five things in life: friends and family, books, hobbies, health, and imagination.

31. Friends and family are your anchor. They support you even in the darkest of times, often without asking for anything in return. When ambition tires you out or the world turns indifferent, it is they who remind you who you are.

32. Books are not just sources of knowledge. They are mirrors and windows. They teach you to think, but more importantly, they teach you to feel and to remain humble. As Hisham Matar writes in his recent book *My Friends* (2024), and I quote: "... we ask of writers what we ask of our closest friends: to help us mediate and interpret the world... Like Montaigne, you believe that the very presence of books in your room cultivates you, that books are not only to be read but to be lived with." (end quote)

33. Health deserves your conscious attention. Make active choices. Read about it. Speak to professionals. Take it seriously. As Dr. Rajiv Mehta, a senior psychologist based in Delhi, notes in his book *Rewire, Rework, Reclaim: How to Manage Stress* (2024), and I quote: "The idea of regular medical check-ups has still not become a routine part of our daily lives. We often go to the doctor only when a problem crops up, which leads to unpleasant consequences at times" (end quote). Prevention is not a luxury. It is a responsibility to yourself and those who care for you.

34. To those who are quiet, introverted, or anxious, I see you. The legal profession often feels loud, but strength is not always measured in decibels. It lies in clarity, in insight, in depth. As Susan Cain reminds us in her book titled *Quiet*, and I quote: "Spend your free time the way you like, not the way you think you're supposed to" (end quote). There is no single mould for what a lawyer should be. Make room for your own rhythm. There is enough space in this profession for many ways of being.

35. There is also room for imagination in law. It is not a dry craft. It is a living, evolving space of ideas, emotions, and hope. Sigmund Freud, in his book *“The Interpretation of Dreams”*, once observed, and I quote: *“Unexpressed emotions will never die. They are buried alive and will come forth later in uglier ways.”* (end quote) So don’t suppress your dreams. But also, don’t let them consume you. Use the law as a canvas — to shape, to reform, to express, to heal.

36. And when it all feels too heavy — the deadlines, the decisions, the expectations— remember what John Gray wrote in an interesting book titled *“Feline Philosophy”*, and I quote: *“Whereas cats live by following their nature, humans live by suppressing theirs.”* (end quote) So, it’s okay to take a pause in life, sometimes. It’s okay to be uncertain. You don’t always have to prove yourself. Sometimes, just being is enough. With these words, I end my address. Thank you.