

## INTERVIEW WITH PROF. TARUNABH KHAITAN

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**Dayaar** - Good Evening Professor Khaitan, we are happy to welcome you for this interview with Law and Other Things, a blog that you have also been associated with and a part of. As most of our viewers know, Professor Khaitan is Professor of Public Law and Legal Theory and the Hackney Fellow in Law at Wadham College, Oxford. He is also a Future Fellow at the University of Melbourne and a visiting Global Professor of Law at New York University Law School. Today, we will talk to Professor Khaitan about his journey in academic writing, research in India, and one of the recent initiatives that he has been involved with *The Junior Faculty Forum* which provides young Indian law scholars a platform to workshop, discuss, and receive feedback on their papers.

So, Professor Khaitan, you have written a lot and all of our audience has had the good fortune to read one or the other piece by you. And I think that with through all these pieces, every reader has got the opportunity to think deeply about public law through. I think, for both Vishal and me, it was your piece in the Oxford Handbook on Indian Constitution regarding Article 14. So we really wanted to ask you about your journey as a writer and how you felt your personal writing grow and what has helped you in improving your writing?

**Professor Tarunabh** - Well, firstly, Thanks to Dayaar and Vishal and through you to the Law and Other Things Blog which I have indeed had the pleasure of being associated with for a very long time, I was a part of the Editorial Board for an inordinately long period and gave it up only after I could not manage those duties with the Indian Law Review as its General Editor, so, it's a pleasure to talk to you and reengage with the blog, albeit, in a different capacity. My journey as an academic writer, I think, it began with an internship during my undergraduate years with the MKSS (Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan). As some of you might know, it's a union of farmers and laborers in rural Rajasthan, and among others run by Aruna Roy. I was in the 2nd year of my undergraduate law degree and I remember distinctly sitting in this little mud hut, where Aruna was bent

over a ‘chullah’ (a wood stove) making Rotis for us all interns, I think there were five of us, and simultaneously quizzing us about what we wanted to do in life. I told her that I was thinking of the academy as an option, and in a very characteristic Aruna style, she sort of thought about it for a moment and then told me, I am paraphrasing, I think she said something along the lines of “*Yes, the democracy needs its scholars but make sure you write in a way that is accessible and that the people can understand*” and I think that was an important lesson that stuck in many ways, so, I believe the key motivation for writing was captured in what she said. Democracy needs its scholars, I have thought for long about why democracy needs its scholars and I think the academy is part of a system of checks and balances in any democracy, we are the truth-telling institution, we discover different types of truth, while the media looks for more obvious, on its surface truths, the academy tries to discover more deep-rooted unclear truths which require longer time and truth is essential for a democracy to function, and therefore accessibility and clear communication is a key to being a scholar. I think that being obscure and requiring a further interpretation of what you might be saying is a disservice to the truth-seeking function of scholarship, so, I would say that was probably where my journey as an academic began.

**Dayaar** – And how do you see your journey in terms of your writing improving overtime? Because at least what Vishal and I have felt, is that all of us do try to write as simply as possible but you really get to know only when someone else reads your work if that is actually simple for the reader and that is where at least to me feedback has really helped. I was looking at your first session at the Junior Faculty Forum, with Dr. Mohsin Bhat’s paper, and he also sort of talked about how he had the opportunity to workshop his paper multiple time, and he tried to simplify it but sometimes those simplifications led to greater complexities. So how do you see the platform such as JFF or generally any other workshopping platforms, helping papers, to improve their writing in terms of simplifying things and, clearly expressing the ideas?

**Professor Tarunabh** – See, good writing is a skill that is continuously honed, it’s a lifetime’s worth. Some people move in the opposite direction, I have read scholars who have actually written quite clearly when they were younger but were seduced by certain schools of writing in their more mature years, and became unintelligible and incoherent. So one hope is one is not moving in the wrong direction. And the second thought is that as you say workshopping is really important both for improving substantive ideas you are discussing in the paper and its communication, how clearly you are coming across. There’s a process of becoming a voice that speaks not to the self, so one of the tropes of being an early career scholar is that usually, people who get into the academy tend to be very clever people and a lot of the things in whatever they are working on are relatively obvious to them so they don’t often understand, really, what needs to be explained because things that they take for granted as obvious, may not be obvious to an intelligent reader in a different field. So the process of learning to write is also the process to be able to shift the point of view, the gaze of articulating your thoughts. And of course, as a scholar you have to think about what you want to say, and what you are saying is robust and sound and based on evidence and defensible and justified and all of that. But then there is a process of distancing yourself, getting out of your head, and seeing what you want to say from the point of view of the audience that you want to communicate to. That is a difficult process and that takes time and it has to be honed throughout.

As a doctoral student, I remember sending a chapter to another mentor Professor Denise Reaume from Toronto and she wasn’t my supervisor, she owed me nothing but as a precocious young student I just took my chances and sent it to her and asked if she could give some comments. And she very kindly invited me to coffee in a café and pulled this sheet of paper out, it was my printed article and there were more marginal notes in red than probably the printed black ink. That was one of the most helpful and useful things I did as a growing

scholar because a lot of the comments, so of course she gave me fantastic substantive criticism of how I could improve the paper which incidentally became the paper on dignity that was published in the Oxford Journal in 2012, but she also gave me a lot of insights about writing well. So yes, the mentorship is really helpful. People who have discovered it themselves are invaluable to this process and there's just no reason why everybody should reinvent the wheel. Like if I have invented some skills the hard way, it's incumbent upon me to pass on those skills to others. There's just no sense in discovering it by trial and error over long time and mentorship is really useful.

**Vishal** - So you spoke about how someone helped you in writing. I remember that when I sent an article to the ILR, you sent me a philosophy guide in terms of helping me improve my writing. Is there any specific material apart from this that you think helps people write on topics?

**Professor Tarunabh** – So, we are trying to put together a bunch of different guides to writing. One thing I should be clear about is that there is no one way to write well. There are many different styles, there are many different approaches through which you'll find your own voice over time. There are also many bad ways to write, so, saying that there many ways to write does not mean that every way is acceptable. Basically the goal is this, writing-reading time is at a premium especially in our times of short attention spans, so much reading availability, when I was growing up in a small town in India, this is pre-Internet days, there was nothing to read, there were no library books apart from schoolbooks and the daily newspaper, there was really very little. I remember sitting down for breakfast and reading the instructions of whatever the recipes on the cereal box, or to buying things wrapped in newspaper and reading that. You were just so starved of reading that you read whatever. The world has changed completely where TLDR is a sort of all too common. So you have to earn your readers' belief that reading you will be worth time and that means being kind, to the reader by being easy to read and also telling the reader upfront why she should invest the time it will take. If it's an article, it's half a day, if it's a book, perhaps a week, if it's a blog post, maybe 15 to 20 minutes. Whatever it is, you have to earn that privilege to be read, you can't take it for granted anymore. The reading sphere is very crowded and part of what good writing means is the ability to get your readers' trust that the time spent with you will be worthwhile.

**Vishal** – So, in terms of beginning the writing process, so say, when I discover a topic that seems really interesting to me, how should I approach it in terms of starting, so, when I start writing, I am always confused as to how I should start thinking about this topic, how I should approach the structure of the paper because what I am thinking in terms of what the paper should be is very different from what the ideas I have about my topic. So, it is sometimes to reconcile these two things for me sometimes.

**Professor Tarunabh** – Look, here's a thought, I think at the undergraduate level, your writing goals should be different from your writing goals as a research student and then as an academic. And I mean this kindly so don't let this put you or any of your audiences off. There are two parts to academic writing, right, the first part is what we have been discussing so far, the soft skills, by soft I don't mean unimportant. While part of it is being easy to read, but the main point of academic writing is creating and disseminating new knowledge, that's the point of our profession, our vocation as scholars and even the most precocious undergraduate student, the cleverest and hardest working student will struggle to say things that are genuinely interesting in novel, insightful and deep about the law. There is a process of synthesis, and seeing the bigger picture, and these are things that just years of experience and the doctoral process, the supervised process of writing and thinking gets you to. That is simply, to my mind, I wouldn't say impossible but next to impossible as an undergraduate student.

I think that as an undergraduate student, the skills you should be seeking to master are skills of clear writing and argumentation. So, rather than churning out or trying to write research papers, I think the first duty of an undergraduate student should be to read. To read worthwhile material and to imbibe it and think about it and to digest it and to discuss it with your peers and discuss it both on its substantive arguments and its style. When you have your reading group, think about how easy a particular piece was to read and when you are trying out writing, I am not saying don't try out writing but write essays. Write essays and short pieces for around 2000 words trying to communicate an argument, sort of honing your soft skills, figuring out how an argument can be defended, must be defended, how you must comprehensively research that particular topic, how you have to be kind and generous to the opposition. You're not trying to convince me to join your political party, as a scholar your job is not to persuade, your job is to discover the truth and then to present it in the most accessible form. So, keeping an open mind, being open to changing your mind, having all of these sorts of intellectual humilities is probably the most important virtue of a scholar. So, picking up those soft skills so that if you start a research degree down the line you can hit the ground running and your supervisor will be quite pleased. As doctoral supervisors, we end up spending a lot of time teaching some basic skills that frankly undergraduate education should have done.

It's clear to me that most Indian law schools, and this is not a comment on the two of you but having read enough material from undergrad students, it's an irony that Indian law schools get you to write a lot. At least in my undergraduate years, I wrote 60 papers over 5 years but it doesn't seem to be getting anywhere. There is hardly a process that incrementally builds upon your writing skills and the volume may be a part of the problem. Given how much is being churned out by students in your project work that the teachers don't have the time to read. I think it would be much better to have a system of five papers or even two papers in 5 years, but papers that are genuinely engaged with by a senior academic, by your professor who gives you good feedback. I think that will be more worthwhile for you and for the professor's time in terms of teaching you how to write than 60 papers that are skimmed through. So, I hope that's not offensive but I really think this is a time to learn, this is not the time to teach.

**Vishal** – Thanks, that was really helpful. So, in terms of actually what goes into making a good paper. even as an undergraduate I am still trying to figure this out. And like you said we don't get the skills here. So, what kind of aspects are necessary for a good paper to have?

**Professor Tarunabh** – So, when I am looking at an article, at a manuscript I mainly think of five key things: the first issue that I am really interested in a journal article is what is its thesis? What is the point of this paper? What's the research question? One article is one argument, sometimes early career scholars, I mean you have so much to say right and you have spent between 5 to 10 years sort of held back in school and now finally is your chance to give voice to all these ideas have been simmering, bubbling away. One of the biggest pathologies of early-career scholar papers is that they put everything clever that they have thought of in one paper, that's a mistake, there will be time, take it easy, one paper is one idea, not everything. So, depth is definitely better than breadth in terms of the scope of the paper. Is it a question that needs answering? Is it a sharp and precise question? Is it a question that can be answered? And what is your answer? Is it a plausible answer, interesting answer? So that is the first thing that I look for in a paper and you will be surprised by how many papers we get which either don't have an argument or have an argument that the reader has to do excavation work to unearth and that's already lost my interest. Because that will take so much work to figure out so it's just not worth it. That's the first thing.

The second thing I look for in a paper and beyond the sharp question and the answer you give to it, is its knowledge base, so have you actually done the toil? Have you done the hard work? Have you looked at all the relevant material on the topic? Anything that you have not, I will send it back to you and say that look, there is an important piece missing. And here, one of the biggest pathologies, in part because of how a system of education has come to be, which is you do your undergraduate at an Indian law school and then you go to the US or the UK to do a Masters degree and this is more common in people who do there LL.Ms in the US which is, we will often get papers in which they take an Indian problem and just pick up an American framework and apply it without any further thought. Look, I am a comparative lawyer and I have certainly no allergy to the comparative law but this is comparative law that is really badly done. Firstly, there is no effort to find out what the scholarship or the Indian doctrinal law even mandates. There is no case made for why the US or whether this paper needs comparable law and if it does why the US might be the best case to compare with? Why are you doing this? So, this is a derivative applied scholarship which is mostly pointless and they are sent back to authors usually. That's a huge problem with a lot of the paper that we get from early-career scholars but some late-career scholars as well. So, again completely uncompromising in our attitude to the comprehensiveness of research.

In within it is also a methodological question that is embedded which is, if your question is empirical, say your question is how long does the Supreme Court on average take in deciding an SLP and your method is analytic, an analytic method cannot usually answer an empirical question. Or if a question is conceptual but you're trying to do ethnography, so the method must be dictated by the question. They have to fit, the method must be able to answer that question and obviously, you have to have the expertise in the method, you have to have the disciplinary rigor and these are all sorts of things that form the analytic side, the third criterion which is how good is your critical analytic ability? Can you think through the pros and cons of an argument? Can you think of the opposition in the literature, if there isn't one, can you pre-empt? Can you think of what are the plausible arguments against you? Read those arguments generously, treat the opposition generously, take their strongest points and engage with them sincerely. And do the steps in your argumentation, in fact, lead to the conclusion or not? One issue I have with the Oxford undergraduate essays is that they are given a question, they will argue something else in the body, and then by the time they reach the conclusion, there will suddenly remind themselves of the question, they will produce a conclusion out of thin air but the main body of the essay has no bearing on that conclusion. So, the conclusion is a response to the actual question asked but most of the essay is not. So, you know do all the argumentative steps neatly follow each other? All of these are sort of the third criterion.

So, we have the question asked, we have comprehensive enough knowledge, we have analytical skills for the structure and the communication. Now did you tell the reader what your destination is? Did you show them the roadmap, your argumentative steps by which will take them there? Do you follow that roadmap? Do you flag at various points signpost what you have told the reader, why you're telling the reader, where you will take them from now? How this leads naturally to the next step? So, well-rounded, easy to read the paper. Your audience must be tired, extremely busy academic with multiple demands on their time. So will that person find this easy to read? Not easy in terms of substance right but easy to read. That's the fourth thing I look for and finally, originality.

Are you contributing to the literature? There is no point so you can write essays as an undergraduate to try out ideas and those essays need not be novel. But if you're writing something for publication in print, there is no point in writing it unless you are contributing to the literature. What is the gap in scholarship that you are

seeking to fill? Why do we need to publish this? Is our collective understanding of this topic going to be enhanced because the piece exists in print? And those are the five main things that I look for in a good paper.

**Vishal** – So, maybe these are the things that people who are submitting to JFF will find important as guidelines.

**Professor Tarunabh** - I should just say about the JFF, the Junior Faculty Forum is basically an idea that had been going for a long time and in part because of my editorial experience at the Indian Law Review. There isn't a workshopping culture, in most Indian law schools. I believe that there are experiments with them happening in some places but even when things are being tried out, it's very rare to have a workshopping culture where the paper is pre-read. So the sort of the skills of good writing and nuanced argumentation are really only developed when your discussants, your commentators have read the paper before. So listening to a lecture and getting comments based on that will never come close to the quality of feedback you will get when everybody in the room has read the paper. So the idea of the *Junior Faculty Forum for Indian Law Teachers* is to workshop papers by Indian law faculty who presumably don't have workshopping opportunities in their home institutions and , there is only one rule for attendance, you have to have read the paper, if you haven't read the paper, don't come. The second rule is, I said there is only one rule but that is for attendance. There is a second rule for intervention, for making a comment, which is that the point of an intervention is not for the intervenor, for the questioner, or for the commentator to show to everyone how clever they are. The point is to give good, kind, high quality, robust but generous feedback to the author. The point is to make the paper as good as it can be with kindness and generosity. I've seen enough workshops where people are unnecessarily rude and unkind to each other and that can really damage the self-confidence of early career academics. So, those are the sort of the twin objectives, constructive but robust criticism.

**Dayaar** – Thank you for bringing up the objectives of JFF. On that point, you talked about writing as an individual and how do you go about it but I also wanted to take your time to talk about the institutional support and the role that plays towards being an academic, or generally towards writing. You finished your undergraduate degree at National Law School, Bangalore and you have also stayed closely associated with Indian scholarship both through JFF and previously through Indian Law Review as well as the Equality Law Fellowship at University of Melbourne. So, I wanted to ask to you, as someone who has had the opportunity to stay closely associated but also be an external observer towards Indian academia, what do you think can either universities do or what generally do you see are the problems in the Indian research ecosystem and what do you think can be done towards this to provide better opportunities to younger law faculties?

**Professor Tarunabh** – It's a very difficult question and a very difficult problem. It requires a multipronged approach so I should preface my answer by saying that I know that there are many people in India who are trying to fix this and trying to fix this sincerely. But this is a huge systemic problem and it's not going to go away overnight. Part of the problem is capacity and supply of good scholars. Part of the problem is that most of the NLUs are basically largely oriented towards giving a vocational qualification/ qualifying law degree/ to make lawyers who can practice. Although most of them are deemed universities, they are not universities in the real sense because universities are places which don't really focus on vocational skills. They generate and disseminate knowledge, and question knowledge and critique and advance it. So if research work isn't happening at the universities then I think it's stretching the meaning of the word University to call it that. So, robust postgraduate and doctoral programs are what make a place a University and that is really lacking in most Indian law schools. The part of the capacity problem is that there are just not enough people within law schools who are interested in research for historical reasons, the structures have never incentivized doing research until

recently. It has never mattered for career progression whether you do research. But to my mind most importantly, the manner in which teaching and administration are organized in most NLUs makes research next to impossible for faculty. The amount of contact hours that every academic has with students is mind-boggling, it's astonishingly high compared to any functional university system. I don't think it does the students any favor either to have this regime of daily lecturers, two exams every term, mid-term, and an end-term and project work. So, basically the slog of lecturing and marking is never-ending. And if you students are interested in seeking to change that culture, you have to demand a change in the teaching style that leaves academics some time to write and to think and to workshop. I would not be producing anything in that system and I don't imagine anyone could, I mean there are a few brave souls who do that and I don't know how they do it, their day is probably of 36 hours but it's really difficult. And it also encourages a system of learning which is based on spoon-feeding and I don't know if that still goes on.

In my days, there were four people in every class or maybe two who would take copious notes of everything the lecturer had said, a week before the exam photocopies will be made of those of notes and everybody just read those notes. So, it is not like anybody's paying attention except those four note-takers. You have to move away from this extremely intensive but pointless manner of teaching which wastes your time, which wastes the teacher's time. I think, one day a week based on actual work done by you, hours spent in the library, doing your own reading, maybe producing something sensible, before you go to see your teacher, where you can't hide and they can't hide. That's a much more promising way to teach and much better use of their time than the current system. And research will also happen a lot better in the system, so that's part of the structural problem that exists as well. The third problem is the changing political climate in India where increasingly academic freedom has come under pressure in ways that were unimaginable even a decade ago. And self-censorship has become a real thing and I don't think any system of scholarship can thrive if scholars have to worry about what they're saying and how, where, and to whom.

**Dayaar** – On the note of you, mentioning how the system is rigorous but sort of pointlessly so in a manner. And you mentioned in one of your previous answers about how...

**Professor Tarunabh** – The system is demanding, not rigorous

**Dayaar** – Yes, right. And in one of your previous answer, you mentioned how students are writing sixty papers over the five years and there is no system of feedback per se. How do you see Indian universities not just improving scholarly output which of course the answer is, as you mentioned, is to improve capacity and improve research output, but also to ensure the students grow as a better writer. Of course, as you mentioned, that undergraduate is not probably the right stage to write but to provide them, as you mentioned, that there is a lot of things that you believe should be taught in the undergraduate program but it's not taught. Where do you see that or like what can be done?

**Professor Tarunabh** - Indian NLUs have a really valuable resource which is that they are highly selective, they are probably more selective than any other system in the world. Just given India's size, given the number of people who apply and the available places, any half meritocratic system of selection would largely pick very clever people; that is not in doubt. It is clear that the system sort of works, there are huge access and equity issues in the system but it broadly gets that more or less right. The problem is with what is done to the talent that comes through the law school gates. A more targeted and a more focused and a more individualized way of teaching how to write which necessarily will mean a dramatic reduction in volume, so as I said previously, like the five criteria I just mentioned earlier in the interview to you. Clever people don't need very long to be

taught how to write, these criteria are, once you hear them, they seem so obvious and there are enough guides available online. Imagine if you had a workshoping culture in your faculty where a faculty member circulated a draft paper weekly or fortnightly and the entire faculty gathered, pre-read to critique it. How could you not learn how to write by participating in those workshops? I think the 60 projects in 5 years should be cut down to, I don't know, at the most five research essays over 5 years and no more than 2000 words each. I think fewer will suffice as well. The issue is not how many you do but if you do 2 or 3 papers that are well written and then you get individualized feedback in a way that's possible for the faculty member to give. So you don't write papers for every topic, maybe every year in law school you have to choose one course where you will do maybe half the coursework and half the credit as a written paper, it's your choice and the weight will be distributed. You can even do sort of quotas so that the weight is distributed evenly between faculty, so first come, first serve, you have to make choices in every subject say like ten spaces of whatever is the quota unit you need to distribute it equally, sign up for it, write a supervised paper which the faculty member can mark and give you individual comments on writing skills. There can be some people hired just for teaching if the regular faculty were just overwhelmed, like one or two research coordinators, people who can do writing workshops to whom you can go to and get 15 minutes of one-to-one time. I think that will be the time much better spent, both the student time and academic time. The current system of project work, I don't think it works. It is also bad for the environment, I don't know if you have moved to online submission but all that paper if you're still printing it, I don't think it is serving any cause.

**Dayaar** - On one point, thankfully we have moved to Turnitin, but what the content is in those papers is probably a good question that still remains. Just another thing, as we were talking about Indian Law Schools, you have been a part of an Indian Law School, and are associated with the Indian Law Review. As you obviously know, all law schools have multiple student law journals with little to no faculty association, and some have done well too which I personally do think has been the result of closer faculty supervision. How do you see journals in India and especially students led Journals? If you were to advise them, what would you advise them so that the students can play the role of editors in a better manner? For example, the five points you mentioned are something which probably no one teaches them to look for when they are playing their editorial roles, which maybe even should not be the case in the first place. How do you see this issue?

**Professor Tarunabh** – I am going to be rude again here and again it is not targeted at the two of you. I just don't think it's the best use of undergraduate student's time to run a student journal. And it's not about your talents as individuals, you're simply not at the stage to make those decisions. This is basically borrowed from a pathological American law school experience. Other disciplines don't have student-run journals. The system of peer review requires a review of other established experts in the field, which is the gold standard for academic publishing. American law schools for their own bizarre historical reasons have student-run journals. While one could make an argument for journals run by doctoral students aimed at research student writing, I really don't see any argument for undergraduate students spending their time running journals. I really think that those are not spaces where academics should be sending their article, those are not spaces where students should be putting in their time and efforts into writing. I don't know what the motivation is, I am sure part of the motivation is an interest in the Academy, in scholarship, and that is best nurtured by reading and reading and then reading. And by talking, thinking and doing a little bit of writing but not with a view to publish it. And I am sure there are other more strategic motivations of building up a CV and there are plenty of other ways where you can do that more fruitfully which is a better use of your time than running a student Journal. So again, I don't mean to be harsh but I just don't think it is the best use of your time.



**Vishal** - Both of us are also part of LAOT, so in that sense we do perform a similar role as a journal but I think here we act more like a filtration process to reach the Senior Editors. Also, in one sense it is different from an academic paper because in an academic paper you're that much more deeply engaged in the subject. But how do you think blogs work as a format and what should we as editors look for in a blog piece?

**Professor Tarunabh** – Yes, blogs are different. I think law blogs can play a useful and supplementary role to journals. I have frequently written blog posts based on half-baked ideas, ideas that are not quite ready to commit to a journal in print but ideas that are interesting, ideas that I want to try out as a thought balloon, see what my peers think about it. Ideas that I want to put out quickly and space that I want to use to comment on other people's work without having to write a full review or a response. So blogs can be an extremely useful supplement to academic writing as long as they are self-conscious about their role as building upon and helping scholarly publications. So, you have both a pre-publication role and a post-publication role. You are very good forums for trying out ideas that later become journal articles and I know a lot of ideas first tried out as blog posts these days. And once the papers are published, so the Iconnect blog I mentioned it to you both does this with the ICON Journal, the International Journal of Constitutional law, which is the post-publication function where it invites other authors and other experts in the field to comment on papers published by a Journal. So, these are both ways in which you're furthering scholarship, you're helping scholarship. I think that can be suitably handled by students with proper oversight or supervision, as I believe is the case with the Law and Other Things (LAOT). I believe the second role the blogs should seek to perform and also social media accounts, so for example ILR Twitter account for example tries to do this, which is to disseminate information about opportunities. In our unequal world, access to opportunities, access to information about opportunities itself is so asymmetric that just making whatever you find out about, because once you become a harp, once you become a network, information finds its way to you. And then it's your duty to broadcast it, to let others know and make use of the information. I think that blogs can perform that role as well of 'Call for Papers', information about conferences, fellowships, jobs, scholarships, things like that. So, those are things that a journal can't really do, but blogs can very well.

**Vishal** - So, you spoke about how there are specific aspects that you look for in a research paper. What should we look for in a blog piece? So when we're reviewing, we always have this problem deciding what kind of pieces should publish? Because sometimes there's no novelty, sometimes it's extremely descriptive. So, this is something, we are trying to understand, what would you say we should look for in this?

**Professor Tarunabh** – So, the threshold would certainly be lower for screening a blog post so I would not insist on comprehensive research, because if the author had to that, why would they do publish a blog post, why wouldn't they write a fully-fledged piece. I think a descriptive piece can be valuable even if it lacks an argument, especially in a country like India where we don't even have good quality basic textbooks in most areas of law. So a descriptive piece which puts together the key cases in an area of law that is not well known is valuable. In fact, the Indian Law Review also has a conspectus section where we publish things which would basically be book chapters. So they don't have an argument, they're putting material together, but in the Indian context where we don't have good textbooks, that can be useful. So, I would apply different standards but you still have to pass some threshold of scholarly interest. On whether this is new or not as an idea, I guess there is a different consideration for blogs in particular, to some extent for the notes section of a journal is used for the case notes and legislative notes, but often reacting to new developments, just means applying pre-existing frameworks and ideas to a new issue and that may not be particularly insightful but that is still helpful, especially to the activist and the policy world. And blogs are a good vehicle to do that. So, that's basically translation work

done by lawyers for non-lawyers who are interested in understanding the issues. So how does, for example, the jurisprudence on discrimination applied to the Citizenship Amendment Act? Now, intellectually it is, so far as I am concerned, that is a clear-cut issue. There is no, now it's not like I am a Dworkinian who believes in one right answer, but it's as close a case as one can possibly find to one right answer. How could anybody think that Article 15 is not breached by the Citizenship Amendment Act? So, there's very little scholarly value in that argument but because of the salience, the political importance of the issue, Blogs should certainly carry a piece making that claim, I believe Journals probably should as well at least as a legislative note. But for a research article on the CAA, for example, I would demand something more, something novel that doesn't just tell us that given what we know, this is wrong but also has some insights.

**Vishal** – I think, to that extent, Law and Other things collaborating with JFF, provide a good platform to announce the speakers and also provide a summary of these arguments. How do envisage JFF growing in terms of workshopping, you see this growing in terms of each Law School having one, or simply as JFF also becoming one of the many places that we can go to.

**Professor Tarunabh** – I think how it grows will depend on who joins it and takes ownership of it. I am clear that I don't want to do this for life. It is an institution that I am building, I don't want to do Indian Law Review for life, I think it is bad for institutions when people who are founders stick around for too long. Institutions have to have a way of self-renewal and growth. I also think, so as a fine line between you don't want to leave too early because institutions should become sustainable, and I think any renewal should be staggered rather than everybody who started it leaves at the same time. So, there are fine issues to be balanced but JFF, I see my role with the JFF as an advisor and even that is a time-limited role, at least as an engaged advisor as a time-limited role. We have three excellent conveners who are very enthusiastic, Jayprakash Meena, Animesh Das and Swati Singh, they all do a lot of work in the background. So, look eventually of course, the workshopping space, in some ways is the more the merrier, but you also don't want to end up with a system where there are so many workshops that workshop fatigue sets in. Certainly, one in every institution is the minimum you would hope and expect. And JFF can even then be a pan-Indian workshopping space where you are not controlled by your institutional boundaries. I think that a Junior Faculty Forum has many other possibilities to evolve and to grow as a forum for junior faculty teaching in Indian law schools because they have a load of other issues that they can make common cause on. Not just paper workshop, so I already mentioned workload issues. Similarly, teaching in any law school especially as an early career scholar is a nightmare. It's extremely demanding and I have no doubt that it leads to, I know it for a fact, that it leads to many mental health issues and it is usually precarious because our universities have moved to a system of contract-based hires rather than guaranteeing academic security and therefore academic freedom. The pay is better than it used to be but still nowhere near where it should be, it's gendered, it's much harder for women. Academic freedom is often an issue, you have directives from the academic management, from the institution management about what you can and cannot say, so, there are so many issues in which the forum can become a union for early-career scholars who can make common cause and use the space to think about what we need.

As I said at the start of the interview, universities are essential for democracy so they're not doing this for themselves, they are doing this for the future of our democracy and this is hugely important. I see the Forum as having all of these possibilities but how it gets used will depend on the people who sign up for it. The first meeting was quite encouraging. We had many people who showed up. I think a majority was still made up of doctoral students and master students in various institutions from India and abroad. Hopefully, that will begin to change, we'll have more buy-in from early-career scholars. But it's just early-days and we need to do much.

**Vishal** – On that note, we would like to thank you, Professor Khaitan, for taking time out and giving us a lot to think about in terms of how our universities can improve and also how we personally can improve in terms of our writing. We would also like to congratulate you on being a part of the Junior Faculty Forum, which we think is an extremely important initiative and it will be extremely useful for junior faculty to collaborate and organize themselves better and to resolve all the issues that you spoke about. So, we are really thankful to you for sharing your time.

**Professor Tarunabh** – It's been a real pleasure talking to both of you, Dayaar and Vishal, and thanks for the opportunity. I wish you all the best for whatever you decide to do in life.