

**Rural Governance, Justice and Citizen Participation Elective (Spring 2026)**  
**Course Instructor – Ajay Kr. Pandey, Professor, JGLS**

Rural Governance, Justice and Citizen Participation elective course strives to address the ‘disconnect’ between the larger constitutional promise of a dignified life to every citizen and the reality of undignified human existence of a majority of population, especially in rural India. The course uses methods of experiential learning and experiments with them to develop them further. The most important aspect of this course is its focus on addressing the larger crisis of disempowerment in rural spaces. The seventy third amendment to the Constitution of India aims to restore the dignity of Panchayati Raj institutions that they deserve. However, even after over three decades of this amendment, villages in India continue to present a picture of citizen disempowerment. Relying on various tools of citizen participation, the course aims to address citizen disempowerment, presenting opportunities for students to consider and learn ways to effect citizen participation for good governance, democracy and rule of law and support India’s aspiration for Viksit Bharat by 2047. The course covers some fundamental aspects of rural people’s everyday well-being, i.e. food, health, education, social security, rural infrastructure, and access to justice. It is a unique course in terms of its methodology and coverage of topics. In addition to the Haryana Panchayati Raj Act, 1994, it covers micro level participatory development processes like Gram Panchayat Development Plan and Aspirational Blocks Development Programme. Through construction of Village Social Map, the course walks through several key indicators of human development including some key Sustainable Development Goals. While the course places importance on developing certain skills amongst the learners, its greater focus is on certain values that are necessary for community lawyering, organising and leadership. Another important facet that the course pursues is university-community engagement, as it reaches for the University Grants Commission’s National Curriculum Framework and Guidelines, 2020, “Fostering Social Responsibility & Community Engagement in Higher Educational Institutions in India”. Having adopted a few villages surrounding JGU, the course also responds to various aspects of Ministry of Education, Government of India’s Unnat Bharat Abhiyan. Various community centric initiatives that the students undertake through this course include:

- Organising legal literacy events for village citizens;
- Creating awareness in villages on the role of Gram Sabha in initiatives like GPDP AND ADDP;
- Preparing material for legal literacy;
- Helping village citizens in representing their concerns at appropriate forums;
- Carrying out surveys, fact finding, social audits etc. to assess effectiveness of various developmental and welfare policies, programmes, schemes, and initiatives of the government;
- Organising discussions on issues of villages together with village citizens and local government officials.

***Suggested Readings and References:***

Budd Hall & Rajesh Tandon (ed.), *Socially Responsible Higher Education: International Perspectives on Knowledge Democracy* (2021).

Marly Cornell, *Together We Empower: Rekindling Hope in Rural India* (2016).

Frank S Bloch (ed.), *Global Clinical Movement: Educating Lawyers for Social Justice* (2010).

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Ajay Pandey & Shireen Moti, *Teaching and Learning Rural Governance in Law Schools: An Account of an Experiment with Clinical Legal Education*, *The Law Teacher* 58:2, 201 (2024).

Donald Polden, *Educating Law Students For Leadership And Responsibilities*, *U Tol L Rev* (2008).

Stephanie M. Wildman, *Democracy And Social Justice: Founding Centers For Social Justice In Law Schools*, 55 *J. Legal Educ.* 252 (2005).

Rose Cuison Villazor, *Community Lawyering: An Approach To Addressing Inequalities In Access To Health Care For Poor, Of Color And Immigrant Communities*, 8 *N.Y.U.J. Legis. & Pub. Plo'y* 35, (2004-2005).

Jane Harris Aiken, *Access To Justice: The Social Responsibility Of Lawyers*, 16 *Wash. U. J.L. & Pol'y*, 81, 85, (2004).

Kevin R. Johnson, *Lawyering For Social Change: What's A Lawyer To Do?*, 5 *Mich. J. Race & L.* 201, 205, (1999).

<https://Unnatbharatabhiyan.Gov.In/Introduction> (Accessed July 24, 2023).

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*Aspirational Districts Programme: An Appraisal*, United Nations Development Programme, India (2020).

*An Assessment Of Aspirational Districts Program*, Institute For Competitiveness, An Affiliate Of Harvard Business School, And Social Progress Imperative (2020).