

Extinction event?

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Will AI replace paralegals in the frontline of legal work? Chandu Gopalakrishnan reports

To kickstart her work, Samridhi Jain, a final-year law student and part-time paralegal in Bengaluru, turns to tools like ChatGPT, Claude and Perplexity.ai. These AI-powered platforms have streamlined tasks like legal research, helping her quickly sift through complex statutes and summarise case law.

“My workflow is improved with ChatGPT’s efficient research and understanding, and Claude’s outputs are effective for client-facing work, minimising the need for heavy editing while maintaining professionalism,” she explains.

“While certainly not flawless, these AI tools often provide the initial confidence to dive into a task, enabling me to ask more informed questions of seniors and grasp the broader context of the transaction I am working on.”

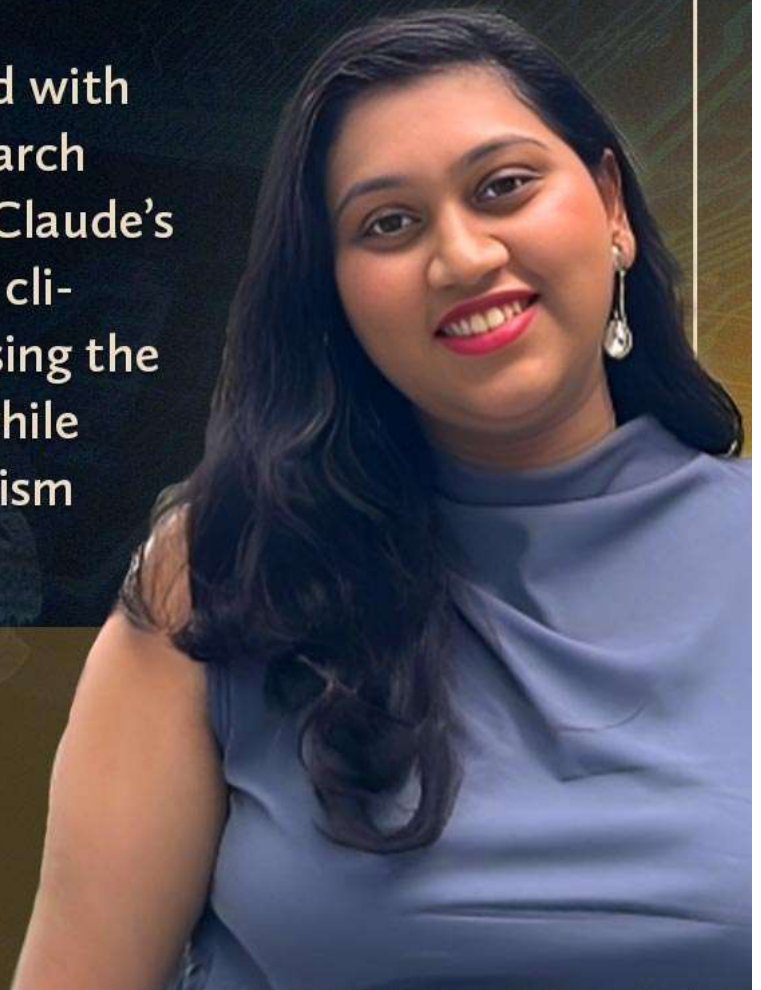
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Samridhi Jain
*Paralegal
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According to her, AI tools and legaltech services free up lawyers from tedious and repetitive tasks, allowing them to focus on developing business-focused skills and providing strategic insights. But the question arises as AI tools and the host of new legaltech services become more sophisticated: will they replace paralegals or simply augment their roles?

To understand the issue, *India Business Law Journal* sought the views of various stakeholders in the legal ecosystem, from law firms, policymakers and educators to legaltech companies and, of course, paralegals.

The role of paralegals

In India, paralegals perform essential functions that are often hidden behind the scenes. They assist with legal research, draft documents and help clients navigate the complexities of the legal system. Yet, unlike the US or the UK, where paralegals are formally recognised and certified, India's legal framework offers them little recognition.

The Advocates Act, 1961, which governs the legal profession in India, fails to define or acknowledge paralegals as a distinct category. This regulatory oversight limits career opportunities and perpetuates the ambiguity surrounding their role. Despite their contributions, paralegals in India operate without the formal recognition or structured support systems that could help them thrive.

While paralegals in India do not need formal legal qualifications, having legal education or training significantly enhances their ability to perform effectively, especially in specialised or complex legal environments. The National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) attempted to address this training gap through its paralegal volunteer scheme in 2009. The initiative trains individuals to provide grassroots legal aid and promote awareness about citizens' rights.

While the scheme is laudable, several respondents pointed out that it is focused primarily on community-based work, leaving paralegals operating in corporate or litigation settings without formal status or standardised training.

Where AI tools could help

While the roles performed by paralegals vary from firm to firm, below are the tasks they generally perform.

- **Drafting.** Prepare legal drafts, affidavits, wills and contracts.
- **Court support.** Organise case files, index documents and support lawyers during proceedings.
- **Liaison.** Facilitate client-lawyer communication and navigate procedural complexities.
- **Administrative tasks.** Manage records, correspondence and scheduling in legal offices.
- **Dispute resolution.** Mediate conflicts and support *Lok Adalats* (an alternate dispute resolution forum) for settlements.
- **Research.** Conduct legal research, and compile statutes and precedents for cases.
- **Technology.** Use legaltech tools for research, document review, e-litigation and compliance support.
- **Legal awareness.** Conduct literacy camps and educate communities about rights and welfare schemes.
- **Legal aid.** Assist in filing free legal aid applications under the NALSA (National Legal Services Authority) and other schemes.

According to the responses collated from four legaltech firms, at least four of these functions can be automated completely. Their assessment is divided into three categories.

- **High automation potential.** Drafting, administrative support, research and technology-assisted services can be significantly automated with current tools.
- **Partial automation potential.** Legal awareness and liaison services can benefit from automation but require human involvement for cultural or emotional contexts.
- **Low automation potential.** Advocacy and dispute resolution remain highly human-centric due to their reliance on empathy, judgement and interpersonal skills.

The responses *IBLJ* garnered show concern that these technologies, designed to automate tasks traditionally performed by paralegals, might render many tasks obsolete. However, the consensus among legal professionals right now is that AI will not replace paralegals but rather redefine their roles.

Komal Gupta, chief innovation officer at **Cyril Amarchand Mangaldas** (CAM) in New Delhi, asserts that AI is revolutionising workflows by streamlining repetitive tasks. CAM claims to be the first Indian law firm to adopt artificial intelligence and machine learning-based legaltech in its day-to-day practice.

“AI will be instrumental in unlocking the wealth of information within the firm. Looking ahead, AI will revolutionise both internal operations and client-facing services by streamlining processes like drafting, legal research and due diligence, while offering predictive insights and personalised solutions,” says Gupta.



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Komal Gupta

*Chief Innovation Officer
Cyril Amarchand Mangaldas
New Delhi*



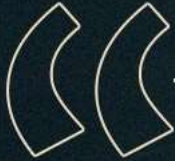
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Paralegals themselves echo these sentiments. Shivansh Singh, a law student balancing academic and paralegal work in Bhubaneswar, emphasises the importance of adaptability. “AI is a great tool when used carefully. I come from a time when AI was practically non-existent, like in 2020 and 2021,” he says.

“Back then, I had to conduct research manually and simplify keywords myself. Now, AI simplifies keywords for me, which makes searching on platforms like SCC Online and Manupatra much easier.”

Ayush Chandra, chair of the Policy Innovation Committee at the Indian Society of Artificial Intelligence and Law in Mumbai, says the concern crops up from certain mindsets.

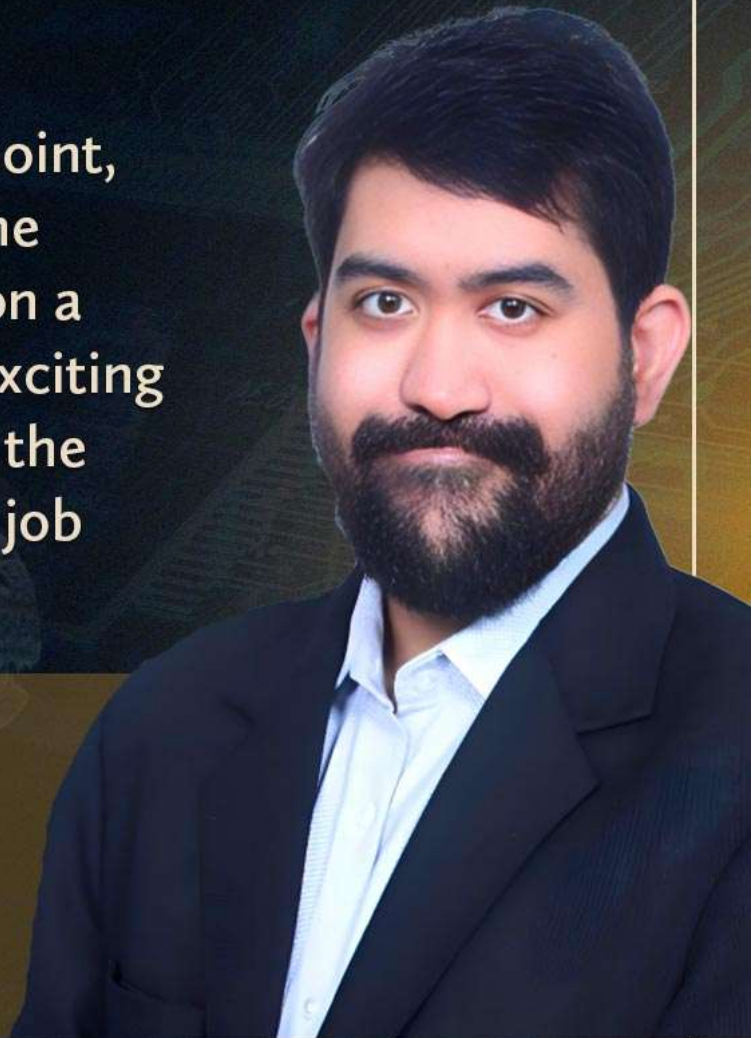
“From a growth standpoint, the use of AI assists the paralegal in focusing on a more important and exciting product that will help the paralegal learn on the job, rather than working on such aspects that would require hours of work on something mundane and cause extreme burnout,” says Chandra.



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*Chair of the Policy Innovation
Committee, Indian Society of
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He agrees that there are some tasks that will still require paralegals to go through and interpret. “In some domains, particularly litigation and decision making, AI technologies cannot deliver the necessary outcomes; the human touch will always be required to replace a computer.”

The potential of AI use remains perfunctory as of now, according to Hera Nafis, advocate at the High Court of Calcutta, in Kolkata. “At its current level of maturity, AI remains best suited as a secondary or tertiary resource rather than a replacement for paralegals,” she says.

According to Nafis, the real survivors in this shift to increased use of technology will be the paralegals who embrace AI tools and integrate them into their work processes, leveraging technology to enhance efficiency and precision.

“Far from being replaced, these individuals are likely to redefine their roles, evolving into indispensable legal technologists who bridge the gap between traditional legal work and the modern capabilities of AI-driven tools,” she says.

According to most respondents, the potential of AI to transform legal workflows is perhaps most evident in its ability to automate repetitive tasks like due diligence, legal research and document review. These are the areas in which most legaltech firms now specialise.

Who gains from legaltech?

Legaltech involves leveraging technology and software to deliver legal services, streamline workflows and enhance access to justice. It includes a range of tools, platforms and applications that help legal professionals, law firms and clients handle legal tasks with greater efficiency and affordability.

Based on the stakeholders *IBLJ* spoke to, it is evident that legaltech is reshaping the profession at an unprecedented pace, streamlining workflows, reducing costs and enabling firms to handle greater volumes of work.

Major law firms have started building in-house legaltech capabilities. For them, the adoption of AI is not just about improving efficiency but also about driving innovation. In fact, CAM launched Parambh, India’s first legaltech incubator, in February 2019.

According to Irshad Saifi, director of IT and digitisation (CDIO) at [Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas & Co](#) in New Delhi, there is a common misconception that simply acquiring advanced technology

translates to business value.



Recent studies indicate that while law firms are investing heavily in AI, many lack clear strategies for its implementation or monetisation

Irshad Saifi

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“Recent studies indicate that while law firms are investing heavily in AI, many lack clear strategies for its implementation or monetisation,” he says. “Technology is not an end but a means to solve problems. The key lies in identifying and addressing these problems effectively.”

Smaller firms and independent professionals also stand to gain from legaltech, as it levels the playing field by providing access to tools once reserved for large-scale operations.

Catering to this market, a host of new legaltech firms have arisen in a short time. Most of them offer automated services that paralegals currently perform.

Take the case of Claw LegalTech, with its popular tools automating various services. LegalGPT simplifies legal research, while AI Drafter automates document creation and clause analysis.

Another tool, AI Courtroom, claims to enhance litigation by crafting arguments, predicting verdicts and evaluating evidence.

“These tools don’t replace professionals,” says Aditya Goel, CEO and founder of Claw LegalTech. “They amplify their expertise, allowing them to focus on what truly matters, and help common citizens be more legally independent.” According to Saifi, of [Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas & Co](#), AI-powered legaltech tools play a pivotal role in paralegal services by enhancing efficiency in legal research, document drafting, summarisation, analysis, due diligence and transcription.

However, human oversight remains a major factor in almost all legaltech services.

Claw LegalTech claims that their products are trained on more than 25,000 Indian legal documents and more than 10 million case rulings. But they also have hired legal experts who “validate and fine-tune results to guarantee precision and trustworthiness” and perform “stringent checks to ensure outputs are aligned with legal and ethical norms,” says Goel.

Legaltech firms often have a hard time being accepted by law firms.

Pranjal Poddar, co-founder of legaltech firm DreamLegal in Bengaluru, says it is often tough to convince legacy law firms to switch to legaltech. “Many firms are hesitant to alter longstanding workflows,” he says. “Firms often struggle to navigate the vast legaltech landscape. Balancing cost with perceived value can delay adoption.”

Perceived complexity, tech apprehension and budget concerns are universal, says Goel. “Adopting AI is more than just flipping a switch – it’s a cultural shift,” he says.

“The common hurdle we face is tech apprehension: ‘Will AI replace my job?’ This question often looms large. Our answer? No, AI liberates you from monotony so you can focus on strategy.”

Adaptation challenges exist within legal services, too, points out Anuradha Chowdhary, founder and CEO of boutique law firm ZeroTo3 in Mumbai.

“One challenge is monitoring how younger team members use AI tools. As lawyers, our training is rigorous and deeply rooted in turning to the statute and codified law for answers,” she says.

“Solely relying on AI for legal research is risky for two reasons: first, AI outputs aren’t always accurate, and second, younger lawyers are increasingly depending on AI over foundational sources.”

Summing up

According to the responses, the gains from legaltech are clear: faster workflows, reduced costs and enhanced accessibility. However, our respondents add that the path to adoption requires careful navigation, particularly in balancing efficiency with ethical considerations.

A study of the responses *IBLJ* received from law firms, policymakers, educators and legaltech companies show a broad agreement: the way forward lies in collaborating the creation of a robust ecosystem where paralegals and other legal professionals can thrive. AI and legaltech will not replace paralegals, but rather redefine their roles.

“I believe that AI will assist paralegals’ focus on higher-value activities that involve correct research, due diligence, an eye for detail and other qualities that make the role of paralegals useful and recognised in the legal profession,” says Chandra, of the Indian Society of Artificial Intelligence and Law.

“It would undoubtedly eliminate the need for paralegals to do routine duties such as report preparation, case filing, case management and other paralegal-related responsibilities.”

For paralegals like Samridhi, the solution lies in adaptation. According to her, the future of her profession is one where technology complements human effort.

Fellow paralegal Chandana Surthi in Hyderabad vouches for customised AI tools that suit the specialised sector of litigation you work in.

“I am a strong advocate for the idea that AI serves to enhance the paralegal profession by optimising tasks rather than replacing jobs,” she says.



Tools like ... CoCounsel and CaseText enhance legal research and document review. Additionally, MikeLegal aids in trademark searches, and Smart Advocate organises case management

Chandana Surthi

*Paralegal
Hyderabad*



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Surthi specialises in technology law and litigation, particularly personal injury cases. For her, a host of AI tools help her streamline basic tasks.

“Tools like Medical Legal Spider streamline medical record summaries, while CoCounsel and CaseText enhance legal research and document review. Additionally, MikeLegal aids in trademark searches, and Smart Advocate organises case management, showcasing the diverse applications of AI in paralegal work,” she says.

According to her, paralegals and lawyers are valued for their empathy, critical thinking and judgement. AI is great at quickly reviewing documents and processing data, but it cannot match the human ability to understand context and make thoughtful decisions, she says.

