

## Jnana Prabodhini Competitive Examinations Centre, Pune.

**Celebrating journey of its alumnus  
on account of  
Tridashakpurti Varsha 2025-26  
(30 years of establishment)**

### **Shri. Siddharth Chapalgaonkar**

- Currently practicing as Advocate-on-Record, Supreme Court of India
- LLB - ILS Law College, Pune. Batch of 2019
- B.E (Civil) - K K Wagh College, Nashik. Batch of 2014
- JPCEC Batch of 2014
- Practicing advocate at the Supreme Court of India & High Court of Bombay. Worked in areas of constitutoinal matters, NCLT, executive actions and various other domains



Siddharth Chapalgaonkar is a Civil Engineer turned lawyer, currently practicing as an Advocate-on-Record, Supreme Court of India.

Born into a family originally hailing from Beed and Aurangabad in the Marathwada region of Maharashtra, his father, a civil engineer, frequently relocated across the state for various projects. This necessitated a shift in the family's base from Aurangabad to Pune, where they eventually established themselves in Talegaon Dabhade.

It was in Talegaon Dabhade that Siddharth received his foundational schooling at Balvikas Vidyalaya, an institution also widely recognized as Annasaheb Chobhe High School. Following this, he pursued his 11th and 12th-grade studies, focusing on science, in Chinchwad. His academic trajectory then led him into the field of engineering, a discipline he pursued from 2010 to 2014 at KK Wagh Engineering in Nashik, culminating in the attainment of a degree in Civil Engineering. This technical background, however, would soon

give way to a different, more profound ambition, setting the stage for a significant and deliberate shift in his professional path.

### **The Pivot to Public Service: Engineering a New Path**

The decision to pursue the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) examinations was not an immediate or predetermined choice for Siddharth, but rather a realization that solidified during his engineering studies. Initially, his primary focus was solely on completing his engineering degree, with no inherent inclination towards UPSC. However, as the prospect of graduation loomed, the universal question of "what next?" prompted a deeper reflection on his future. Siddharth openly acknowledges that his decision to undertake UPSC was not a meticulously "calculated" one, nor was it a spontaneous whim. Instead, he describes it as somewhat akin to "going with the flow," a sentiment he notes is common among many preparing for competitive examinations. Nevertheless, he affirms that it was a well-considered choice.

An interesting facet influencing his early inclinations was his family's distinguished background. His grandfather was notably both a journalist and a lawyer, and his uncles were accomplished journalists in Pune, which naturally fostered an early interest in journalism within him. This familial exposure subtly guided his early interests, hinting at a broader inclination towards public affairs and societal impact that would later manifest in his legal career. However, the ultimate decision made during his engineering years gravitated towards the rigorous path of UPSC.

### **Jnana Prabodhini Competitive Examination Centre: A Gateway to Civil Services**

Siddharth's formal entry into Jnana Prabodhini's Competitive Examination Centre (JPCEC) in 2014, where he would remain until 2016, was not entirely a venture into the unknown, as he possessed some prior familiarity with the institution. His acquaintance with Jnana Prabodhini stemmed from two primary experiences: firstly, he had previously taken an IQ test for admission to their school in 3rd or 4th grade, though he was not successful in gaining admission at that time. Secondly, he was aware of the existence of Jnana Prabodhini's school in Nigdi. Beyond its academic reputation, he recognized the institution's commitment to nurturing diverse strengths, understanding that it was not solely focused on traditional academics or rote learning. This broader appreciation was particularly reinforced by his own

extracurricular pursuits; as a Pune District Table Tennis player during his school days, he was well aware of Jnana Prabodhini's strong inclination towards promoting sports.

The specific catalyst for joining Jnana Prabodhini's competitive exam centre, however, came after he completed his engineering studies and definitively decided to pursue UPSC. He learned about the centre primarily through the interviews of Amrutesh Aurangabadkar, an IAS officer at the age of 21, who had expressly lauded Jnana Prabodhini in his public statements. Upon conducting further inquiries, Siddharth discovered the competitive exam centre and its distinctive entry procedure, which involved a small, evaluative test. He diligently prepared for this test, successfully cleared it, and was subsequently selected for the 2014-15 batch, which comprised a limited cohort of 80 students.

This selective admission process stood out significantly, distinguishing Jnana Prabodhini from the typical competitive exam coaching classes prevalent at that time. Generally, one could simply pay the requisite fees and enrol. However, the concept of a mandatory entrance test and a restricted batch size of 80 students profoundly appealed to him, as it signalled a more qualitative and committed approach to education. He observed that subsequently, the batch strength might have been even further reduced, reinforcing the institution's emphasis on quality over sheer numbers. This selective nature, he felt, was a refreshing and commendable deviation from the conventional commercial coaching models that prioritized volume.

### **Experiential Learning and Cultivating Discipline**

Siddharth's tenure at JPCEC, commencing in 2014, provided him with a profoundly holistic experience that transcended mere academic preparation. The most significant learning, according to Siddharth, was the ingrained emphasis on discipline. This encompassed strict adherence to class timings and, notably, the participation in weekly prayers, known as 'saptahik upasana'. During these spiritual gatherings, mentors—Vivek Sir and Savita Tai would impart guidance that extended far beyond the confines of competitive exam strategies, focusing instead on cultivating a general sense of life discipline. This one-year experience involved rigorous academic engagement, attending all prescribed modules, and his active and positive personal participation.

The deeply embedded cultural ethos of Jnana Prabodhini left an indelible mark on him. A recurring and impactful message conveyed during the Saturday prayers was that while

passing the competitive exam and securing a coveted public service post was undeniably important, the ultimate and broader objective was for a Jnana Prabodhini student or activist (कार्यकर्ता) to "create a positive influence" wherever they went. This principle instilled in him a profound sense of responsibility and purpose that extended well beyond individual professional achievement.

Regarding the formal academic modules, Siddharth vividly recalled specific teachers and subjects that shaped his learning. Akshay Tapadia Sir taught Constitution, and Prajakta Thakur Madam, an IRS officer, imparted knowledge in History. Rishikesh also contributed to the teaching faculty. His chosen optional subject for the UPSC examination was Public Administration, which was expertly taught by Nandedkar Sir. The analytical and conceptual approach to Public Administration imparted by Nandedkar Sir proved immensely beneficial, providing Siddharth with a robust foundational understanding that he continues to leverage in his professional life.

The transition from the analytical rigors of Civil Engineering to the broader, often interpretive, social science subjects required for UPSC, such as Public Administration, was surprisingly seamless for Siddharth. He attributes this ease of adaptation to a pre-existing intellectual environment at home that actively encouraged journalism and extensive, varied reading, which prevented him from encountering any significant difficulty in grasping the nuances of these new subjects.

## **Navigating the UPSC**

Despite possessing a strong academic foundation and a well-honed approach to learning, Siddharth candidly admits that he believes he did not prepare effectively for the actual UPSC preliminary examination itself. While he faced no problem with knowledge acquisition or retention, he felt he lacked the specific aptitude or psychological temperament required for the preliminary exam, particularly the crucial skill of accurately selecting the single correct option from four given choices. He clarifies that this perceived deficiency was not due to a lack of preparation or diligent practice, but rather a missing element in the specific mental attitude or "exam temperament" needed to excel in that particular format.

Siddharth undertook several attempts at the UPSC examination, meticulously detailing his progression:

- First attempt: This occurred in 2015. This specific batch was historically significant as it marked the first instance where the CSAT (Civil Services Aptitude Test) was designated as a qualifying paper, a monumental change from previous years (2011-2014) when CSAT scores directly contributed to the total for the preliminary examination. This alteration notably impacted candidates with engineering backgrounds and those proficient in mathematics, data analysis, and quantitative aptitude, as previously, maximizing CSAT scores was a key strategy for clearing the prelims.
- Second attempt: He undertook his second attempt in 2016.
- Third attempt: His third attempt was in 2017.
- Following these initial attempts, he made a conscious decision not to appear for the exam in 2018, 2019, and 2020.
- Fourth and Fifth attempts: After a break and a subsequent relocation to Delhi, he made two further attempts in 2022 and 2023.

Despite these dedicated efforts across multiple years, Siddharth candidly states that he never managed to clear the preliminary examination. This consistent outcome, particularly after his very first attempt, began to profoundly shape his perspective on his future career path and aspirations.

### **The Call of Law: A Deliberate Diversion from Competitive Exam Pursuit**

The transition away from the relentless pursuit of UPSC, particularly after his third attempt in 2017, and even earlier after his first attempt in 2015, marked a significant psychological and strategic shift for Siddharth. He gradually recognized that while he possessed the capacity for diligent study and sustained concentration, the specific format of the exams consistently eluded his success. This realization led him to proactively consider alternative career paths, a suggestion that was also reinforced by Vivek Sir's sagacious guidance during Jnana Prabodhini's prayers, who emphasized the prudence of having a "Plan B" particularly after the initial attempts at the competitive exams.

Siddharth commenced serious contemplation about his future shortly after his first UPSC attempt in 2015, when his scores clearly indicated a lack of immediate success. While a common inclination among competitive exam aspirants is to pivot to other government exams—such as SSC, MPSC, or banking, or even competitive exams within the engineering

domain (given his civil engineering background)—Siddharth deliberately chose a different trajectory. Although his family also encouraged him to pursue other competitive examinations, after extensive discussions with Vivek Sir and his family, he began to explore options that offered a broader scope for continuous learning and intellectual growth.

He seriously considered pursuing Law and Journalism, influenced by his family's deep roots in both professions. At that time, several individuals, though not in the significant numbers seen today, were also embarking on law degrees. He engaged in discussions with those who had already obtained law degrees, ultimately narrowing his choice to either law or journalism. His rationale for consciously deciding against pursuing other competitive exams stemmed from a rigorous self-analysis: he arrived at the firm conclusion that his "exam temperament" was fundamentally unsuited for the specific demands of competitive examinations, irrespective of the subject matter or the level of perceived difficulty. Recognizing this as a core personal weakness, he made the strategic decision to invest his time and energy in formal education rather than remaining in the inherent uncertainty of competitive exam cycles.

A pivotal development in 2016 significantly shaped his path: the Maharashtra Government formally introduced the CET (Common Entrance Test) for Law admissions, and Siddharth was part of its inaugural batch. Concurrently, he also appeared for the entrance examination for journalism at the renowned Ranade Institute, a journalism department at the Savitribai Phule Pune University. Demonstrating his academic versatility, he achieved commendable scores in both examinations, securing selection for a two-year full program in Mass Communication and Journalism at Ranade, and simultaneously gaining admission to ILS Law College, Pune, one of the oldest and well known Law Schools across India through the CET. Due to a court case that caused a temporary delay in the law college admission process, he actually commenced attending journalism college for a month. However, once his admission to ILS Law College in Pune was definitively confirmed, following further consultative discussions, he ultimately decided to enroll in the law program.

Interestingly, during this period of significant career redirection, the option of returning to his engineering profession held no appeal for him. He candidly admits that he genuinely did not wish to revert to engineering. Reflecting retrospectively on his initial decision to pursue UPSC, he contemplates whether it was, perhaps subconsciously, a means to escape

engineering due to an underlying lack of interest, rather than being driven by a genuine desire for public service.

### **Embracing Legal Academia: Life at ILS Law College**

His three years at ILS Law College, Pune, represented a unique and transformative experience, marking his immersion into a completely new academic field that he had consciously chosen for himself. A distinguishing and demanding aspect of studying at ILS Law College was the stringent attendance requirement. Classes typically commenced at 9:15 AM and concluded around 11:45 AM, depending on the number of subjects scheduled for the day. This mandatory attendance felt somewhat burdensome for Siddharth, given his prior completion of an engineering degree and a two-year gap dedicated to competitive exam preparation.

However, the three-year LLB course offered a remarkably diverse and enriching learning environment. Since it was a program designed for individuals who had already obtained a bachelor's degree, his classmates represented a wide spectrum of professional and academic backgrounds, including a few medical doctors and a significant number of senior individuals who were pursuing law concurrently with their existing jobs. A substantial portion of the student body originated from commerce backgrounds, with Law frequently serving as a viable Plan B for those pursuing Chartered Accountancy (CA) or Company Secretary (CS) qualifications. This rich diversity allowed Siddharth to realize that they were all navigating similar professional transitions, which made his own adjustment relatively smoother, particularly given his younger age; he commenced his law studies at 24 and successfully completed them at 27.

Regarding the concept of specialization within the LLB curriculum, Siddharth clarifies that the three-year LLB is fundamentally a general legal degree, providing a comprehensive foundation in various areas of law. Specializations typically manifest at the LLM (Master of Laws) level or evolve organically through practical legal experience over an extended period, often spanning 10 to 15 years. Unlike integrated programs such as BA LLB or BBA LLB, which combine law with specific undergraduate fields, the three-year LLB course mandates any bachelor's degree (be it BA, B.Com, BE, or BSc) as a prerequisite, and the core law curriculum remains consistent for all students, irrespective of their prior undergraduate discipline.

## **The High Court Calling: Stepping into the Legal Arena**

Upon successfully completing his LLB degree in 2019, Siddharth embarked on his legal career, commencing his practice at the esteemed Bombay High Court. He joined the chambers of Nitin Deshpande, a highly respected senior advocate and a distinguished alumnus of ILS Law College, from the 1985 batch. Nitin Deshpande was an exceptionally experienced lawyer, boasting 35 years of legal practice, having previously served with distinction as a government pleader in the High Court. Significantly, he had only recently—approximately six to seven months prior to Siddharth joining—resigned from his government position to establish his private practice, into which Siddharth was welcomed as a junior.

His early experiences at the Bombay High Court were profoundly impactful and laid a crucial foundation for his career. The most important lesson, a seminal piece of advice imparted by Adv. Deshpande on Siddharth's very first day, was to dedicate the initial two to three months solely to understanding court procedures. This comprehensive learning encompassed everything from initial client interaction, the intricate process of drafting legal matters, and, most crucially, mastering the complex workings of the court registry. His senior explicitly advised him to learn more from his clerk than from himself, highlighting the invaluable practical wisdom held by experienced court staff. This early emphasis on procedural understanding deeply resonated with Siddharth, as he quickly grasped that while substantive legal knowledge is paramount, effective filing and a thorough understanding of the registry's functions are absolutely critical for successfully managing and advancing legal matters. He dedicated significant time to immersing himself in registry work during the two to three months before he formally received his "sanad" (license to practice).

Once he obtained his sanad, his senior generously provided him with abundant opportunities to appear directly in court, which served as a significant catalyst for boosting his confidence and practical experience. While drafting legal documents is a standard duty in any legal office, the invaluable chance to argue cases before the court was particularly instrumental in his development.

## **Pioneering Cases: Early Triumphs and Unexpected Opportunities**

Among his early cases that left a lasting impression, two stand out prominently in his narrative. One involved a criminal appeal he personally argued, stemming from a 1997 incident where seven to eight individuals were accused of murder and subsequently sentenced to life imprisonment by a trial court. The appeal had remained pending in the High Court for an astonishing 20 years. Initially, Siddharth sought adjournments, citing his senior's engagements in other courts. However, on the third occasion of seeking an adjournment, the court firmly insisted that either his senior must appear or he himself must be thoroughly prepared to argue the matter the very next day. Following this directive, his senior instructed him to undertake full preparation. On the appointed day, the court, acknowledging his evident preparation, granted him an additional two weeks but explicitly stipulated that he must argue the appeal himself. Successfully arguing a criminal appeal in a Section 302 (murder) case within merely two months of obtaining his sanad was, for Siddharth, an immensely significant and career-defining achievement. The appeal was ultimately allowed, resulting in the acquittal of all the accused, as it was conclusively determined that they had been falsely implicated. This early triumph profoundly impacted his confidence and professional trajectory.

Another notable opportunity arose when his senior received a brief directly from the UPSC. This particular case involved a candidate who had challenged his rejection from the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) examination due to the presence of a tattoo on his arm. Siddharth was granted the invaluable opportunity to represent the UPSC, appearing before the court for a significant Service Commission matter. The candidate had successfully cleared the written examination and potentially the interview, but was subsequently rejected during the physical examination due to a large tattoo that exceeded or was entirely beyond permissible limits. The UPSC and the medical board maintained that there were no permissible limits whatsoever for such tattoos, which formed the basis for the rejection. The High Court, in its judgment, upheld UPSC's decision, stating that it could not interfere if there was indeed no permissible limit for the tattoo.

## **Ascending to the Apex: Practice at the Supreme Court**

Siddharth's trajectory then led him to the highest judicial forum in the country: the Supreme Court. While actively practicing at the Bombay High Court, he frequently appeared before

the esteemed Justice Dama Sheshadri Naidu. Justice Naidu, originally from Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, had initially practiced in Hyderabad before being elevated to a judge in the Andhra Pradesh High Court. He subsequently served in Kerala for three to four years before transferring to the Bombay High Court in 2018. Siddharth commenced his practice in 2019, and Justice Naidu served as a judge in the Bombay High Court from 2018 to 2021. Siddharth regularly appeared before him in various minor matters.

In September 2021, a unique and pivotal event occurred: Justice Naidu resigned from his judgeship to pursue practice in the Supreme Court, despite having three years of service remaining as a High Court judge. This distinctive career move, predicated on the rule that a retired High Court judge can only practice in the Supreme Court, opened an unexpected new door for Siddharth. Recognizing the profound opportunity, Siddharth promptly emailed Justice Naidu, expressing his fervent desire to practice at the Supreme Court and inquiring about any potential vacancy within his chambers. This communication transpired around November 2021. Justice Naidu swiftly invited him, partly due to their prior professional acquaintance established during Siddharth's appearances in his court. Siddharth's comprehensive CV, which already showcased a significant number of court appearances due to the opportunities provided by his previous senior, further facilitated this crucial transition.

### **Dynamics of Justice: High Court vs. Supreme Court Practice**

Siddharth elucidates the key operational and experiential differences between practicing in the High Court and the Supreme Court.

- **Patience in Hearing:** In the High Court, matters are heard with considerable patience and thoroughness, as it exercises appellate jurisdiction, requiring a detailed investigation and comprehensive inquiry into the facts and legal nuances of each case.
- **Pace and Discretionary Jurisdiction:** The Supreme Court, in stark contrast, operates under a system of discretionary jurisdiction. Consequently, matters are often not heard with the same degree of exhaustive patience, and a substantial number of cases are dismissed with remarkable speed. The procedural pace is significantly faster, demanding an exceptionally rapid and accurate understanding of the entire case history—from the trial court records to the Supreme Court paper book—often within a matter of mere minutes.

- **Variety of Work:** Siddharth emphatically notes that the Supreme Court offers a demonstrably greater variety of legal work compared to the High Court. In High Court practice, lawyers frequently specialize, meaning if a senior's practice is heavily concentrated in, for instance, land acquisition, their junior lawyers will often work predominantly within that specific area. However, in the Supreme Court, a practicing lawyer generally handles a broad spectrum of case types. This diversification proved to be a wholly new and profoundly broadening experience for Siddharth in Justice Naidu's chambers, where he gained exposure to and dealt with an expansive range of matters, including civil, criminal, corporate, arbitration, and even some Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) cases.

### **Beyond the Headlines: Navigating High-Stakes Cases**

While specific cases may not always attain "high profile" status in the public perception (which is often associated with political figures or sensational events), Siddharth affirms that he has nonetheless handled numerous "high stakes" cases of significant legal import. He elaborates on several such cases that, despite not always grabbing headlines, represent substantial legal challenges and outcomes:

- **Consumer Forum Members' Service Issue:** A recent and highly significant case involved his representation of members and presidents of Maharashtra's Consumer Forums concerning their complex service issues. These individuals had completed a term and were seeking reappointment. This intricate matter spanned an impressive 1.5 years of litigation, culminating in a substantial 92-page judgment delivered by a bench that included Justice Abhay Oka (who has since retired). This case, despite its technical nature, garnered notable media coverage.
- **Manipur Legislative Assembly Anti-Defection Law Case:** He assisted his senior in a complex case pertaining to the Anti-Defection Law as applied to the Manipur Legislative Assembly, indicating his involvement in matters with significant political and constitutional ramifications.
- **Demolition Stay in Supreme Court:** A particularly interesting recent case involved an individual who had constructed a building that the municipal corporation deemed illegal. Despite the individual having filed a regularization application, which the corporation had not yet processed, the High Court issued a directive for demolition.

Siddharth successfully obtained a crucial stay on the demolition order from the Supreme Court, arguing compellingly that demolition action cannot proceed while a regularization application remains pending and undecided by the relevant authority.

- **Expunging Adverse Remarks Against an Advocate:** In a case that underscored the importance of protecting the integrity and careers of legal professionals, Siddharth represented a friend, an advocate, against whom a court had passed adverse remarks in an official order, alleging the suppression of certain documents. Such remarks could have had a profoundly detrimental impact on the advocate's professional career. Siddharth courageously filed a petition in the Supreme Court, directly challenging the High Court judge's specific comments. The Supreme Court accepted the petition and, in a rare and significant outcome, ordered the expunging of the High Court judge's adverse remarks from the judgment, a testament to the appellate court's power to correct perceived injustices.

### **The Insolvency Frontier: Delving into NCLT and NCLAT**

Siddharth finds his burgeoning experience with the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) and the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) particularly rewarding, especially given the significant increase in litigation in this domain following the introduction of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) in 2016. He explains the fundamental shift brought about by the IBC: previously, if a company defaulted on a loan (e.g., ₹1 crore), the lender's options were largely confined to filing a civil suit or initiating a criminal case. Now, under the IBC framework, a creditor can initiate insolvency proceedings, asserting that the company is indeed insolvent and incapable of repaying the outstanding loan. This means an entire company can be subjected to the insolvency resolution process, which can ultimately lead to its liquidation, a prospect that has made companies far more cautious and, consequently, has led to a surge in related litigation.

Siddharth has had the opportunity to represent a diverse range of clients in this relatively new and evolving area of law.

- **Representing a Company against a Cooperative Sugar Factory:** His inaugural NCLAT matter involved representing a company that had extended a loan to a cooperative sugar factory, whose beneficiaries were farmers. The sugar factory subsequently defaulted on the loan, prompting Siddharth's client company to file an insolvency

application, which was initially allowed by the NCLT. The sugar factory then lodged an appeal with NCLAT, where Siddharth successfully argued the case. He notes that this significant opportunity arose through a recommendation from one of his college professors.

- **Representing a Workman for Back Wages:** Another compelling case involved representing a workman whose claim for back wages was in jeopardy. The workman had been dismissed from his company after his arrest in a criminal case. Five to six years later, he was fully acquitted in that criminal case. The labor court subsequently ordered his reinstatement and the payment of his back wages, recognizing the wrongful nature of his termination. However, the company had entered insolvency proceedings, and the workman faced delays in filing his claim with the appointed Resolution Professional (RP). The NCLT adopted a strict interpretation of the timeline for filing claims. Nevertheless, Siddharth successfully argued before NCLAT that the Resolution Professional himself had delayed his own stipulated timelines by nearly 100 days, thereby making the workman's 45-day delay less significant in comparison. The NCLAT accepted this compelling argument, and as a result, the workman received his justly owed back wages.
- **Saving an MSME from Liquidation:** Most recently, he represented a small-time Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise (MSME) company that faced an outstanding credit of approximately ₹65 lakhs across 13 invoices. The opposing party had initiated an insolvency petition (under Section 9 of the IBC) in 2019, relating to invoices that had been raised in 2016. The NCLT initially allowed the application. Siddharth successfully appealed this decision in NCLAT, persuasively demonstrating that only three out of the 13 invoices fell within the legally prescribed limitation period, and his client was prepared to settle the dues for those specific invoices. This crucial argument was accepted, effectively saving the company from further insolvency proceedings.

## **Reflections on the Judiciary: Perceptions, Challenges, and Paths to Improvement**

Siddharth offers profound and candid reflections on the Indian judicial system, particularly addressing common perceptions surrounding District Courts and the observed variations in High Court judgments.

- **District Courts: Backbone or Bottleneck?** He concurs with the widely held belief that District Courts are the "backbone of the country" and that their capacity to render tough, decisive judgments is paramount. However, a prevailing public perception, often intensified by high-profile cases like the Pune Porsche accident, suggests that District Courts might sometimes be reluctant to rule against powerful parties, leading to cases being escalated to higher courts and consequently contributing to system congestion. Siddharth points out that in the Pune Porsche case, ironically, the majority of bail orders were granted by the Pune court itself, which somewhat contradicts the general perception. He notes that while the Supreme Court frequently emphasizes that District Courts should grant bail, these courts exhibit inconsistency—sometimes making decisions and sometimes not.
- **Chronic Delays in Civil Suits:** For civil suits, cases can regrettably remain pending for 15-20 years in District Courts. He attributes these protracted delays not solely to judges but also implicates lawyers and even clients. Often, once an interim relief (temporary injunction) is secured, clients tend to lose their impetus to actively pursue the case, and lawyers, too, may not prioritize it as much as other matters. Siddharth believes that fundamental and broad-based systemic improvements are critically needed to address such pervasive issues, emphasizing that justice is inherently case-specific and varies significantly.
- **Unpredictability of Outcomes:** He provides a compelling example from an Enforcement Directorate (ED) case where his client, facing an allegation of ₹17 crore, received bail from the Special Court, and the order was not challenged. In stark contrast, another individual involved in a similar complaint, with a comparatively smaller allegation of ₹1.5 crore, had their case escalate all the way to the Supreme Court. This illustrates the inherent unpredictability of judicial outcomes, where no clear pattern dictates which cases will escalate or how lower court orders will be challenged.
- **Conflicting High Court Judgments and Judicial Discretion:** Siddharth acknowledges the public's perception of disparate interpretations of the same law by various High Courts. He asserts that this problem of varying judicial viewpoints is not confined to High Courts but also exists within the Supreme Court itself, where a judgment delivered by one bench might not be readily accepted or followed by another bench, even when dealing with similar facts and legal provisions. He attributes this phenomenon to the broad discretionary powers constitutionally vested in judges. He

cites the recent example of the Jindal Steel Works/Bhushan Steel case, where a liquidation order issued was reportedly stayed by a subsequent bench, allowing the company to continue its operations, vividly demonstrating the rapid shifts that can occur in judicial pronouncements.

- **Judicial Overreach and Unimplementable Orders:** Siddharth also points to instances of perceived judicial overreach, where courts might impose timelines or issue orders that prove challenging to implement in practice. He refers to the recent Tamil Nadu Governor case, where the Supreme Court mandated a two-month limit for the Governor to act on legislative bills. While there were communications from the central government advocating adherence to timelines, Siddharth personally feels that the Supreme Court overstepped its bounds by imposing such fixed timelines, arguing that this interferes with the fundamental principle of the separation of powers. He questions whether such directives to the President are truly binding. He draws a significant contrast with the Supreme Court's own historical stance in cases like *P. Ramachandra Rao v. State of Karnataka*, where it explicitly ruled that timeframes cannot be set for criminal trials, and acquittals cannot be granted solely on the basis that a trial has been pending for an extended period, such as 20 years. This apparent contradiction—the Court setting timelines for executive functions while resisting them for its own judicial processes—presents a logical point of contention for many observers.
- **Arbitration and Curative Petitions:** He provides a complex and illustrative example of judicial discretion and the multi-layered nature of appeals in the *Delhi Metro vs. Delhi Airport Metro Express Private Limited* case. After an arbitrator, the Delhi High Court, and even the Supreme Court had all upheld an award in favor of the private company (entitling them to substantial monetary compensation), and a review petition was subsequently dismissed, the Supreme Court took the extraordinary step of considering a curative petition. Despite the award being affirmed by four judicial bodies (arbitrator, High Court, Supreme Court, and review court), the Supreme Court ultimately set aside the award in favor of the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation, effectively altering a previously settled legal position. He also recalls an older Supreme Court decision that prohibited liquor shops or hotels near highways, which, while perhaps well-intentioned, proved largely unimplementable in practice, leading individuals to devise numerous loopholes.

## **Looking Ahead: A Vision for Legal Practice and Systemic Contributions**

With 6+ years of legal practice accumulated till date, Siddharth reflects on his professional vision and aspirations. He shares a profound piece of advice imparted by his lawyer uncle: one should never predetermine their area of specialization; instead, it is clients and fellow lawyers who will ultimately define where one's specialization lies. He finds this perspective deeply appealing and has consequently not set a specific specialization for himself. His professional philosophy is to embrace and diligently handle whatever case comes his way.

Currently, his diverse caseload includes representing a Senior Administrative Grade Officer of the Indian Defence Accounts Services before the Central Administrative Tribunal concerning a delayed promotion, which stems from issues with their Annual Performance Appraisal Report (ACR/APAR). He is also actively involved in the aforementioned ED case and two significant civil matters before the Supreme Court, among various other legal engagements. This broad spectrum of work reinforces his preference for not limiting himself to a single area of law.

In February 2026, Siddharth was selected as an Advocate-on-Record in the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India. Only the AORs are authorized to file the cases on behalf of litigants in the Hon'ble Supreme Court. Being an AOR is considered a remarkable position in the field of law. Siddharth has joined the group of lawyers amongst whom we have got the Former President of India, Former Chief Justice of India and current Attorney General for India.

Regarding his broader contribution to the legal field or the judiciary, Siddharth candidly admits that it is difficult to predict at this nascent stage of his career. He humbly states that he feels "too young to decide" his overarching professional contribution to the system. He contrasts this with the trajectory of UPSC aspirants who might clear the exam at a young age (e.g., 23 or 30) and can foresee themselves reaching positions like Chief Secretary or Additional Secretary, thereby envisioning and planning their potential systemic impact. In the legal profession, however, he believes that the "results" of one's professional journey typically become distinctly apparent after the age of 45.

## **JPCEC in Future**

As Jnana Prabodhini's competitive exam department commemorates 30 years of its establishment, and having observed its evolution for 10-12 years, Siddharth offers some insightful suggestions as an alumnus. He acknowledges that competitive examinations are inherently highly writing-oriented, involving rigorous written papers for general studies and optional subjects. However, he proposes that Jnana Prabodhini's competitive exam centre should explore technological upgrades and innovations.

He highlights that many contemporary coaching classes now widely offer videos on YouTube, enabling students to study effectively from the comfort of their homes. While Jnana Prabodhini maintains a positive reputation for its somewhat exclusive access (through entrance tests or restricted library entry), he ponders whether the institution could strategically leverage technology, perhaps by creating podcasts or sharing specific modules online, to broaden its reach to a wider audience. Instead of solely relying on aspiring students to physically come to them, he suggests the centre consider proactive strategies to reach out to people and offer benefits through technological platforms, including social media. He believes that embracing such technological advancements would be a crucial and impactful step forward for the institution in the evolving landscape of competitive exam preparation

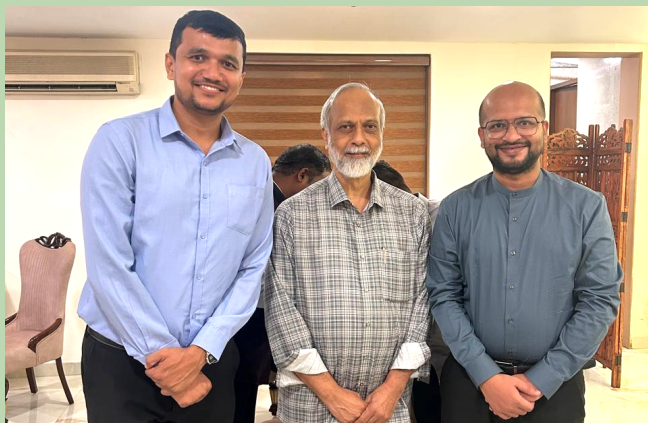
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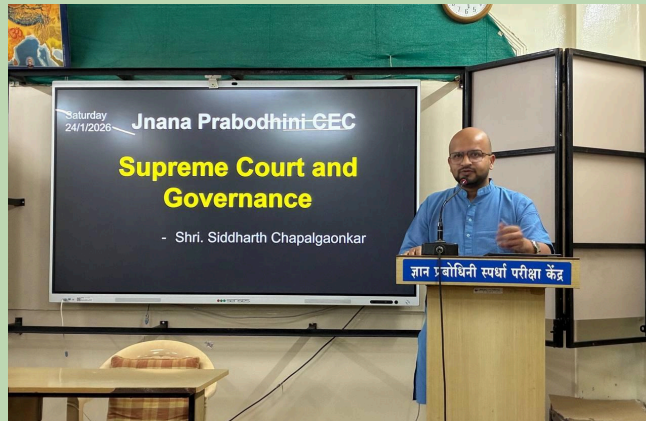
Adv. Siddharth Chapalgaonkar from the corridors of the High Court of Bombay.



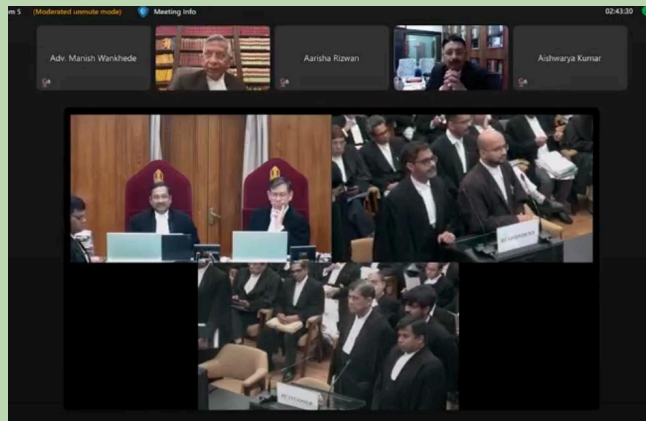
Siddharth with family members.



Siddharth with Dr. Vivek Kulkarni at the JPCEC Alumni get-together at the Maharashtra Sadan, New Delhi.



Siddharth in an interaction with JPCEC students about functioning of Supreme Court and Governance structure.



Siddharth during the arguments in one of the hearings at the Hon. Supreme Court of India.