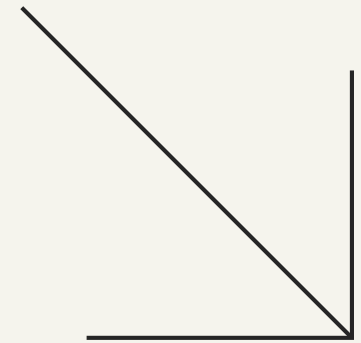


From Pokhran to AI Governance: Technology & the Law



What began with a nuclear test in the Rajasthan desert has evolved into one of the most consequential legal journeys in modern Indian history. On May 11, 1998, the Pokhran-II tests under Operation Shakti announced India's technological sovereignty to the world. But sovereignty demands governance and over the next three decades, India's legal architecture stretched, strained, and ultimately transformed to keep pace with the technologies it sought to regulate.



India's journey from Pokhran to AI governance reflects the evolution of both technology and the law. Each legal milestone since 1998 has shaped how innovation, state power, and individual rights coexist in the digital era. Let's walk through it!

1998: Foundation

Pokhran II & the birth of National Technology Day

India's successful nuclear tests and Hansa-3 aircraft flight marked technological sovereignty, and a policy need to regulate dual-use technology exports and nuclear liability.

2000: Legislation

Information Technology Act, 2000 India's first digital constitution recognised electronic contracts, digital signatures, and cybercrimes, translating the technological confidence of the late 1990s into a formal legal framework for the emerging internet economy.

2008: Amendment

IT (Amendment) Act, 2008 The most controversial addition, **Section 66A**, criminalised "offensive" or "menacing" online messages in language so broad it handed authorities alarming power over digital speech, a provision that would eventually be struck down as unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 2015.

2015: Landmark Ruling

Shreya Singhal vs. Union of India (MANU/SC/0329/2015) The Supreme Court struck down Section 66A as unconstitutional, *recalibrating the balance between state control and individual liberty in the very digital spaces the 2008 amendment sought to regulate.*

2019: Policy

National AI Strategy & Aadhaar jurisprudence NITI Aayog's AI strategy outlined a responsible AI roadmap, while courts refined Aadhaar's legal limits, bringing privacy principles from Puttaswamy into direct conversation with large-scale technological systems and governance tools.

○ 2021: Rules

IT (Intermediary Guidelines) Rules, 2021 Introduced traceability requirements, grievance redressal mechanisms, and content takedown timelines, marking a shift from broad legislative frameworks to granular platform-level compliance and accountability.

○ 2024-2025: Emerging

AI regulation & the Digital India Act Debate Advisory frameworks for AI intermediaries, deepfake regulation efforts, and the proposed Digital India Act signal a transition from reactive governance to anticipatory regulation in response to rapidly evolving technologies.

○ 2026: Today

National Technology Day marks ongoing legal and technological transitions. From a single IT Act to evolving frameworks on data protection, platform governance, and AI regulation, India continues to build a more responsive legal architecture one that is still adapting to the growing complexity of emerging technologies and the demands of an expanding digital society.