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## Project Dhananjay: Final Report

### About

An exemplifier of hard work, grit and dedication, we know "Dhananjay" as the third son of Queen Kunti, and a dear friend of Lord Krishna. His archery skills were known to be legendary, but they did not come to him overnight. His eye was always at the eye of the proverbial fish in the pond, which in this case was the coveted title of *“The Best Archer in the World”* or *“Sarva Shreshtha Dhanurdhar”*. His commitment to being the best had led him to take the hardships head on, and surpass them to come out on the other side even stronger. Dhananjay, which was also the first name of Arjun in the order of all of his 10 names, (viz. *Vijay, Shwetvahan, Phalguni, Kirti, Vibhatsu, Sabyasachi, Gunakesh, Parth, Jishnu, Kaunteya*), had earned a distinctive name for himself in mythology not because he was of royal blood, but because, he was able to achieve victory over all those encounters of life, which pull a person down.

The reason why "Dhananjay" has been chosen as the name for CAN's financial support scheme for graduates is exactly that - being the embodiment of hard work, grit and dedication. This Project is a one of its kind initiatives wherein, the Foundation wishes to encourage fresh graduates to join litigation right at the threshold of their professional lives. In acknowledgement of the hardships faced by new entrants, particularly but not limited to first generation lawyers, both in case of finances and connections, the Project essentially provides an “incubatory period” to young and ignited minds of the nation and aims at dispelling the anxieties and apprehensions they might bear as they venture into Litigation owing to their financial conditions or lack of initial support from their families. Some of such candidates may even be placed with lawyers with highly successful practices and Senior Advocates.



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With the opportunity and means provided, CAN hopes that the newly minted law graduates will endeavour to best emulate the values of "*Dhananjay*", with unwavering and precise concentration at achieving excellence at the Bar and contributing positively to the nation.

In the maiden year of the Project, the CAN Foundation released a Call for Applications inviting aspiring fresh law graduates to submit their candidature for the scheme of stipendiary support under the project on 26th January, 2020.

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### Eligibility Criteria

Initially, the eligibility requirement under the Project was:

- Applicant must be pursuing his B.A. LL.B. from any NLU in Final Year/5th year of their study. If the candidate has been placed, then he/she shouldn't be getting more than Rs. 15,000/- per month as remuneration from their place of employment.
- Applicant must have secured not less than 65% marks in the last 2 years of their 5-year Law Course in aggregate/average, without more than 4 repeats/improvements in any subject of the curriculum in the last 2 years.
- Applicant must have had not less than 75% attendance in the last 2 years of their 5-year law course in aggregate/average of the 2 years.
- The annual cumulative family income (of Father, Mother, Unmarried Brother/Sister in the last 3 financial years) on the date of application has been equal to or less than Rs. 10 lakhs per annum, including the latest/last financial year as per the Income Tax Return.

In addition to this, there were several documents required to be attached while submitting the Application. The documents are enlisted hereinafter.

- Copies of Income Tax Returns of Father, Mother and Brother/Sister (if unmarried) of last 3 financial years.
- PAN & Aadhar Card of Father, Mother and Brother/Sister (if unmarried).
- Details of landholdings, house, flat, etc. in the name of Father, Mother, the candidate or his real brother/sister (if unmarried).
- Details about financial support he is getting in the form of scholarship from State/Central Government or any NGO.



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- Certified copies of Marksheet and attendance record of semester/trimester of last two years of B.A.LL.B. Course.
- Copy of CV.
- A 1000 word write-up in the candidate's handwriting (either in English or Hindi) expending on why he/she wants to join litigation, the level of commitment he/she is able to put in, the vision of his/her life and how that vision plays a role in choosing litigation as a career. if he is in practice, how he has survived till now, any achievements or recognition he has achieved.
- A 500-word writeup in the candidate's handwriting (either in English or Hindi) about the basic values and principles of life he/she believes in, values and ethics he/she holds and the values which are most relevant for joining litigation as a career and way of life.

### Relaxation of Eligibility Requirements

After receiving requests from other candidates who had passed from NLUs in the previous year, the Foundation through a notice dated 05 February, 2020, **relaxed eligibility requirements** and opened it for '**Fresh Law Graduates**' who have **passed out after April, 2018** pursuing B.A.LL.B from any National Law University and also LL.M. from any NLU. Through the same notice, the eligibility requirement was **amended** for the remuneration that the candidate must be getting. *It was required that the candidate must not be getting more than Rs. 20,000 as remuneration from the office of his engagement.*

**The eligibility criteria were further relaxed vide Notice dated 12th February, 2020** to include candidates who have **passed out/graduated from any National Law University in the academic year/session 2017-18 or any year** thereafter. *It was also required that the candidate must not be getting more than Rs. 30,000 per month as remuneration from his employer.*



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## Deadline

The Final date of application was extended to **28th February, 2020** after granting two extensions through notices dated 05 February, 2020 and 12 February, 2020.

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## Scrutiny of the Applications

The Foundation adopted a two-stage process to scrutinize applications received. For the same, 2 (two) independent committees were constituted, i.e., Scrutiny Committee and Selection Committee. The preliminary examination of the applications was done by the Scrutiny committee and it examined the documents of the candidates as to whether it complied with the eligibility requirements. On the recommendation of the 5-member Scrutiny Committee, 3- Member High Powered Selection Committee took the final call as to whether the candidate is worthy or not.

The **Scrutiny Committee** comprised of:

- **Mr. Amalpushp Shroti (AOR, Supreme Court)** - Mr. Shroti graduated from Faculty of Law, RDVV, Jabalpur, in the year 2000. With around 20 years of practice, he has had a multi-faceted experience in the areas of Constitutional Law, Civil Law, Service Law, Electricity Law and Education Law. He is a distinguished Legal Aid Counsel and trained Mediator since 2009. He has been involved in crucial PIL matters dealt by MP High court in recent years and also represents important Government Department & PSU's before the High Court.
- **Mr. Arjun Harkauli (AOR, Supreme Court)** - Mr. Harkauli is a NLSIU, Bangalore graduate with litigation experience of more than 15 years. He qualified the AOR Examination in 2009 and since then has discharged responsibilities of Standing Counsel for the IT Department, UGC and other Statutory institutions. He is one of the principal Advisors and empanelled Counsel for the SBI, IIM Bangalore, ICICI, Vedanta Group of Companies etc.
- **Mr. T. Singhdev (Advocate, Delhi High Court)** - Mr. Singhdev is a graduate of CLC, Delhi University. Practicing since 2005 and having worked with the likes of Late Mr. P.P. Rao (Sr. Adv.) and Mr. Maninder Singh (Former ASG & Sr. Adv.), he has experience



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of handling litigation before various courts, tribunals and forums. He has represented clients like Zee, Pepsi, Essel, BSNL, Dish TV, Medical Council of India, Press Council of India, etc.

- **Mr. Rishad Ahmed Chowdhary (AOR, Supreme Court)** - Mr. Chowdhury graduated from WBNUJS in 2006 and has received JSD (Doctor of Jurisprudence) and LLM (Master of Laws) from Chicago Law School. After working under Senior Advocate Mr. Raju Ramachandran, Mr. Chowdhury has acquired wide-ranging exposure to civil, commercial and public law litigation & has appeared before various Courts, tribunals and forums of the Country. Currently, he is a partner at VERUS Advocates.
- **Mr. Mrigank Prabhakar (AOR, Supreme Court)** - Mr. Prabhakar is a graduate of NALSAR and has worked under Sr. Adv. Mr. Raju Ramachandran. He has been Advocate on Record since 2017. He has been counsel in various high-profile cases such as the Babri Masjid - Ram Janmabhoomi dispute, the Haren Pandya murder case, the Ahmedabad tiffin bomb blast case and the Triple Talaq Matter. He has also represented several famous corporate houses such as Purvanchal Construction Works and Anik Industries Ltd. and activists such as Tehseen Poonawalla and Vimlendu Jha.

The **Selection Committee** comprised:

- **Prof. (Dr.) V. Vijayakumar (President, Consortium of NLU's & Vice-Chancellor, NLIU)** - Prof. Vijayakumar is a well-known name in the legal academia of the Country. Having over 40 years of teaching experience at NLSIU, serving as Registrar of the NLSIU and Vice-Chancellor of the Tamil Nadu Dr. BR Ambedkar Law University, Chennai, he was appointed Vice-Chancellor of NLIU, Bhopal in 2018. He also holds the position of President of CLAT Consortium, which is the body responsible for conducting CLAT (National Level Entrance Examination for NLUs). Prof. Vijayakumar specializes in the areas of Constitutional Law, Administrative Law, Human Rights Law, Law of



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Elections, Refugee and Humanitarian Law. He held the UNHCR Chair on Refugee Law. He is also a member of Academic Council of NLU, Delhi.

- **Mr. Vikramjit Banerjee (ASG & Sr. Adv., Supreme Court)** - Mr. Vikramjit Banerjee is a 1997 NLSIU graduate. He is the first NLU graduate to be appointed as ASG. One of the youngest designated Senior Counsels, Mr. Banerjee has served as Nagaland's Advocate General. He is also a member of BJP Legal Cell and has co-edited a book titled 'The Truth About Teesta Setalvad'. Since inception of the Foundation, Mr. Banerjee has been an active advisor in the projects conceptualized by the Foundation and has helped extensively in their implementation.
- **Mr. Sumeet Malik (Director, SCC Online & Director, EBC Group)** - Mr. Malik is a 1999 NLSIU Graduate with LLM in IP Laws from UNH Franklin Pierce School of Law. Mr. Malik occupies the top most chair at India's leading Legal publishing house EBC. He is also Director at SCC Online. Mr. Malik has been one of the pillars of the Foundation, especially in expanding its reach.

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## Applications Received under the Project

The Foundation received 9 (Nine) applications. After preliminary examination, only four candidates on the fundamental eligibility parameters, whose names are mentioned hereinafter, were deemed fit to be scrutinized by the Scrutiny Committee and Selection Committee. **All these candidates were after strict scrutiny found worthy to be given benefit under the Project.**

- Mr. Chitwan Sharma - 5th Year Candidate from NLSIU, Bangalore.
- Mr. Kirt Agarwal - Final Year LL.M. Candidate from NLU, Delhi.
- Ms. Samikshya Thapa - 2019 Graduate from GNLU pursuing the B.A.LL.B. (Hons.) programme.
- Ms. Prerna Shaha - 2019 Graduate from GNLU pursuing the B.A.LL.B. (Hons.) programme.

The candidates shall be **paid a scholarly stipend ranging between Rs. 15,000-18,000 per month** from the date of starting their professional practice before any Court in the Country.

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### **Chitwan Sharma**

The applicant is pursuing B.A. LL.B. (Hons.) from the National Law School of India University, Bengaluru and is presently in his fifth year. The candidate has been consistently meritorious in his academic and co-curricular endeavours, having obtained commendable grades in subjects dealing with procedural laws, a thorough understanding of which is a key essential for an illustrious career in litigation. He has been an avid debater and mooter and has participated and performed well at national as well as international competitions.

He was awarded the prestigious Aditya Birla Group Scholarship, 2015 - 16 which honours spawning leaders with the passion to excel. It involves a rigorous selection procedure and is one of the most prestigious scholarship schemes in the nation.

Mr. Sharma has gained a multifaceted practical experience having interned both at the Bar and the Bench. He has worked with Sitting Judges of the High Court of Delhi and the High Court of Karnataka and eminent Advocates and has thus garnered the legal aptitude to be able to best understand and advocate highly complex niches of the law.

Further, he has undertaken coveted research internships at premier research institutions which are testamentary to his immaculate understanding of research methodologies and is an indispensable skill for an aspiring litigator.

His knack for innovation and mentorship is evident from a perusal of his initiative lawkeyforCLAT.com. LawKey for CLAT is an online platform for providing expert guidance to students aiming for law as a career. It provides free training material, test series and mentorship to students for CLAT preparation. He has also discharged leadership roles by holding positions of responsibility in his time at NLS.

The candidate has been an active presence in socio-legal initiatives in his time at NLSIU. He has been associated with the Legal Services Committee and has been mentoring first



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year students from Tier III cities in a bid to help them cope with the challenges in a new environment. He has also furthered the cause of students affected due to the recent changes in the examination pattern of CLAT which requires a much more thorough understanding of English language and thus instantly leaving a substantial chunk of applicants that have not had the privilege of an education in English Medium at a great disadvantage.

His commitment to litigation is evident from his endeavour to make judicious use of his time while excelling at the academic rigours of a Trimester system at NLS, ***by being an intern to Hon’ble Mr. Justice S. Sunil Dutt Yadav, Karnataka High Court since July 2018.*** He has also undertaken several internships under practicing advocates and has thus acquainted himself with the subtleties of a litigation practice. He has also underlined that his conviction and his passion for Law stems from the joy he derives from being able to help others. He has pointed that he will be forgoing a financially lucrative spot at a reputable law firm at the national level in order to join a relatively new chamber where he might potentially be the only junior. Mr. Sharma reckons that he will be able to get far more hands-on experience and thus will be able to hone his skills better.

He aims to join the Delhi State Legal Services Authority and a socio-legal initiative Zenith that aims to provide legal aid to the needy in Shivpuri, the knack for which is fairly evident from his undertakings in his undergraduate programme.

Mr. Sharma’s application is supported by a letter of recommendation given by Hon’ble Vice-Chancellor, NLSIU. Mr. Sharma hails from a financially humble background wherein his father and mother are both working to earn a living and to support his education. Though the gross cumulative income of the family is more than Rs. 10 Lac, as required, however under special circumstances, considering his brilliant record, his candidature was considered.



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## **Scrutiny Committee’s Recommendation**

Mr. AP Shroti, Mr. Rishad Ahmed Chowdhary, Mr. Mrigank Prabhakar and Mr. Arjun Harkauli recommended the candidate for financial assistance. They observed that the candidate appears to be bright and perceptive. It was noted that the candidate is shortlisted for Aditya Birla Scholarship and have done prestigious moots like Jessup, and the application being supported by Hon’ble Vice-Chancellor’s Recommendation. An observation to the contrary was made by Mr. Singhdev that Mr. Sharma should be considered for reduced financial assistance since the candidate’s parents were working and that he has already been shortlisted for the Aditya Birla Group Scholarship.

However, in view of fewer applications, and with the rest of the members of the Committee endorsing his candidature for the scholarship, he was recommended for financial assistance under the project.

## **Selection Committee’s Decision**

The members of the Selection Committee accepted the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee and decided that the candidate be given financial assistance under the project. They communicated their decision to the Foundation through their e-mails to the CEO of the Foundation.

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## Kirt Agarwal

The applicant is currently pursuing his LLM from National Law University, Delhi, one of the premier institutes for legal education in the nation. He had graduated from the five-year undergraduate B.A. LL.B. programme from GGSIPU, Delhi with fairly good academic credentials (more than 70 per cent marks).

The candidate has been consistently performing well in his academic endeavours, having obtained commendable grades in subjects dealing with procedural laws as well as subjects dealing with professional ethics and methods of dispute resolution, a thorough understanding of which is a key essential for an illustrious career in litigation.

Mr. Agarwal’s application is endorsed by a letter of recommendation penned by Hon’ble Vice-Chancellor, National Law University, Delhi attesting to his multifaceted approach to his legal education and his knack for knowledge. Mr. Agarwal’s meritorious nature has been previously recognised and awarded by the CAN Foundation under the Eklavya Project Scheme 2019 - 20 wherein he was the recipient of an award of Rs. 50, 000/- for pursuing an LLM from any National Law University in the nation.

Mr. Agarwal is an ardent believer in the utility of negotiation and communication and considers them indispensable to a successful career in law. His inclination toward litigation as a career choice stems from his admiration for analytical skills. Litigation, to him, is fascinating as lawyers become key factors in the formulation and development of law. He considers law to be a quest for what is fair and constitutional and thus the choice for opting for a career in litigation came easy to him.

Taking into his financial position in due consideration, it was found that his family income is less than 4 Lacs Per Annum according to previous 3 ITRs annexed with his application. It is thus fair to conclude that his financial position has been an impediment to his dream. The Foundation has extended support to him in the past by way of a scholarship which



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enabled him to further his education by financially equipping him to be able to pursue an LL.M. from National Law University, Delhi.

Mr. Agarwal’s candidature is recommended for the financial assistance under this Project, particularly in view of very few applications received for this year.

### **Scrutiny Committee’s Recommendation**

All the scrutiny committee members were of the view that the candidate be given financial assistance under the project. They observed that though the candidate has done his graduation from GGSIPU, Delhi, but he is currently pursuing LLM from NLU, Delhi which is a prestigious university. The Application was supported by the Vice-Chancellor’s recommendation. The family income of the candidate was less than Rs. 4 Lacs per annum. On these grounds, Mr. Kirt Agarwal’s candidature for the stipendiary support under the scheme of Project Dhananjay was unanimously endorsed by the members of the Scrutiny Committee.

### **Selection Committee’s Decision**

Prof. (Dr.) V. Vijayakumar, Vice-Chancellor, NLIU, Bhopal and President, Consortium of National Law Universities through his e-mail dated 07 June, 2020 raised an objection with regards to Mr. Agarwal’s candidature for the stipendiary support under the scheme of Project Dhananjay. He noted that the applicant has not completed his undergraduate programme at any National Law University in the nation. Further, Dr. Vijayakumar noted that joining an LL.M programme indicates a lack of interest in pursuing a career in litigation.

However, Prof. Vijaykumar was kind open to reconsider his dissent when informed that LL.M. candidates were also eligible to apply under this Project. The Foundation however considering his suggestion decided that from next year LL.M. Candidates shall not be included under the eligibility net for Project. This has bought other members of the



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Committee on Board, viz. Mr. Sumeet Malik, and Mr. Vikramjit Banerjee, who through his e-mail dated 11 June, 2020 for his candidature and was thus finally accepted for receiving benefits under the project.

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### **Samikshya Thapa**

The applicant graduated from the five-year undergraduate B.A. LL.B. (Hons.) programme in 2019 from Gujarat National Law University, Gandhinagar, one of the premier institutes for legal education in the nation. She is currently practicing as an advocate Delhi at the District Courts and the High Court of Delhi. She is presently working at Bijender Singh & Associates, New Delhi, and is thus well conversant with the nuances of Civil, Criminal, and Corporate Litigation and is receiving Rs. 12,000/- per month from the same.

In her time at GNLU as an undergraduate student, Ms. Thapa had been a meritorious addition to her batch having represented the University both nationally and internationally in reputable Moot Court Competitions. She has consistently added to her academic rigor by undertaking certification courses to expand her knowledge. Ms. Thapa has also positively contributed to legal scholarship by being an active participant in conferences and symposiums, highlighting her research acumen, which is indispensable for a successful career in litigation. Additionally, she has exhibited leadership qualities which is evident from the positions of responsibility that have been accorded to her.

She has undertaken coveted internships at various offices which are testamentary to her immaculate understanding of research methodologies and her exposure to practise both of which are indispensable for an aspiring litigator.

Ms. Thapa values being able to think quickly on one's feet as an indispensable skill for a successful career in litigation. She acknowledges that venturing into a litigation is saddled with financial uncertainties and requires unwavering dedication. She avows to burn the midnight oil in her pursuit of a successful career. She is a firm believer in the courtroom being the best teacher. She reckons that the education one can achieve inside a courtroom is unparalleled. Being a staunch believer in the power and impact of law, she views litigation as an effective tool to drive social change. One of her key motivations to sustain a successful career in litigation is to aid the needy by providing them legal support to



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amplify their voices and concerns. She considers empathy an inalienable part of her persona and believes it to be one of her strengths.

Her candidature for the stipendiary scheme under Project Dhananjay is further supported by her financial status. Both her father and mother are retired government employees. Her Father retired in 2015 and Mother in 2019. Her mother’s income is around 9 Lac PA thus rendering her eligible under revised norms for Project Dhananjay. However, owing to her brother pursuing a Ph.D. in Germany on a scholarship and the financial constraints that it presents, the Foundation recommended her for stipendiary support under this scheme.

### **Scrutiny Committee’s Recommendation**

All the Scrutiny Committee members recommended the candidate for financial assistance under the project. The Candidate has been practicing in Delhi (Both District Courts and High Court) since her graduation in 2019. Her parents are retired government employees and Her mother’s income is around 9 Lac PA making her eligible under revised norms under the Project. Since she is getting around remuneration of Rs.12,000/- per month the candidate is suited for financial assistance and is recommended for the same.

### **Selection Committee’s Decision**

The members of the Selection Committee accepted the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee and decided that the candidate be given financial assistance under the project. They communicated their decision to the Foundation through their e-mails to the CEO of the Foundation.

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### **Prerna Shaha**

The applicant graduated from the five-year undergraduate B.A. LL.B. (Hons.) programme in 2019 from Gujarat National Law University, Gandhinagar, one of the premier institutes for legal education in the nation. She is currently practicing in New Delhi and is an Associate at Legal Consultus, New Delhi. She has assisted in a plethora of matters pertaining to multiple laws, and has undertaken extensive research and drafting in regard to the same thus strengthening her position as a fresh law graduate who is well conversant with the nuances of litigation.

In her stint at GNLU, she has been a wonderful addition to the undergraduate programme by virtue of her commendable academic record. In addition, she has been an active and avid mooter and has represented the University at both national and international reputable moot court competitions and debates. Ms. Shaha has also contributed to legal scholarship by being an active participant in conferences and symposiums.

She has also undertaken coveted internships at various offices which are testamentary to her immaculate understanding of research methodologies and her exposure to the nuances of a litigation practise both of which are indispensable for an aspiring litigator.

In her application, she establishes that pursuing a career in litigation had been a result of exposure via internships and a conversation with Mr. Atmaram Nadkarni, ASG during an internship under his able guidance. She recounts that Mr. Nadkarni emphasised the importance of learning and practicing law at the grassroots level - the district court. She explains that it aided her in understanding the fundamentals of law better.

Ms. Shaha explains that being a first-generation lawyer is a daunting task, one that she plans to take head on. She underlines the importance of being able to give back to the community by undertaking pro bono work in a bid to be an ally to the ones whose rights are being infringed and who do not have the means to seek adequate legal representation.



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It is interesting to note that she was also a recipient of a scholarship under Gujarat National Law University Litigation Assistance and Support Scheme, 2019.

Her financial status, although above the prescribed eligibility under the scheme of Project Dhananjay, bears special consideration for the reasons explained further. Her being the financial support of the family earns more than Rs. 15 Lac. She is also the recipient of support amounting to around Rs. 13,000 per month, under the GNLU Litigation Assistance scheme. ***However, it is pertinent to note that her father has several dependents, one of whom is her brother whose education requires a substantial amount of financial resources.***

However, her candidature for the stipendiary assistance has been endorsed by the Hon’ble Vice-Chancellor of GNLU, Prof. (Dr.) Shanthakumar via a telephonic conversation with the Members of the Foundation.

Her eligibility thus rests in the fact that she has been endorsed by the Hon’ble Vice-Chancellor of GNLU and on account of the receiving fewer applications for the financial support for the present year, she can be considered for a scaled-down stipendiary support. Further, the Foundation recommended her for consideration to the Selection Committee *on account of promoting and supporting female representation in the field of Litigation.*

### **Scrutiny Committee’s Recommendation**

On account of her financial status being significantly above the prescribed eligibility criterion under the scheme of Project Dhananjay, her candidature received wide disapproval by the Scrutiny Committee. Mr. Singhdev observed that Ms. Shaha is the recipient of financial support under the GNLU Litigation Scheme and her family’s income (more than Rs. 15 lac) and value of other land holdings that they possess disqualify the candidate from getting the assistance. The view was shared by Mr. Rishad Ahmed Chowdhary and Mr. Mrigank Prabhakar. Mr. A.P. Shroti however, endorsed her candidature.



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Basing the decision on majority opinion, the candidate was not recommended for financial assistance under the Project. However, keeping in consideration other factors such as the receipt of fewer applications and relaxed eligibility criteria, and the recommendation received from the Hon’ble Vice-Chancellor of GNLU, and for *promoting and supporting female representation in the field of Litigation*, she was recommended for financial assistance.

### **Selection Committee’s Decision**

The members of the Selection Committee decided that the 4 candidates be given financial assistance under the project Dhananjay in view of the detailed minutes, documents, information circulated amongst them as above mentioned. They communicated their decision to the Foundation through their e-mails to the CEO of the Foundation.

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**ISSUED**

*- For & On Behalf of*

**CAN Foundation**

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