

ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN LEGAL LITERACY

Written by *Priyadarshini G*

4th Year BA LLB Honours Student, CMR University, School of Legal Studies, Bangalore, India

ABSTRACT

Legal literacy, according to scholars, is a process of self-empowerment which not only moves women to enforce their rights, but also to redefine and reshape unacceptable rights, as set out in the Law and in practice. Sadly, the deplorable legal literacy scenario in India is a concern. In poor socio-economic conditions, more than 35% of the population is illiterate and more those living under the poverty line. Even people who are educated are powerless and frustrated if the law is broken or infringed. Considering these events, it is necessary to promote awareness of legal literacy among the people, and in particular women, to ensure their legal rights are protected and fully understood. In order to achieve this aim, mass media should play a key role. The social media can reach to the greatest extent through comprehensive reporting and wide distribution and can help promote and propagate the legal literacy across the poorer sections of the society. Keeping this in mind, this Article concentrates on what legal literacy, how it affects the society and how a social media is helpful in promoting legal literacy. In addition, the paper mainly focuses upon the role of social media in promoting awareness to women.

Keywords: Legal literacy, poor, rights, law, mass media

INTRODUCTION

While the law is passed, the government and the Parliament take account of its purposes. There are certain legislations that provide for substantive rights to the people and there are others that focus on the procedural law. But because the beneficiaries have little knowledge, at the point of execution, most laws are unsuccessful.

Awareness of their rights has been recognized as the required action in order to address this issue.¹ This awareness was due to the source of power among the people. India is a country with different laws on different subjects. All these laws came into existence to help the people in need of justice. Nonetheless, because they are not aware of such laws, they have hardly any value and are barely used.

It is necessary to make public awareness about privileges and rights that they enjoy in order to ensure equality for all, to protect common rights and to encourage the legal empowerment of the population. Such awareness can also be credited by allowing the person concerned to use mechanisms that can be used to resolve grievances quickly through government bodies such as the Police, the Executive, and the Judiciary. In fact, knowledge of our laws paves the way for the people to engage in the decision-making process.

Because of this situation, legal literacy has been regarded as a fundamental tool of social change as it gives them the necessary knowledge of their rights. Legal knowledge refers to primary-level knowledge of law. When people (predominantly underprivileged or marginalized groups) are aware of their rights under the law, this knowledge can be used as a weapon to counter injustices. Such a sense of consciousness can be a huge turnover in their lives as this time they need not stay quiet when their right is violated. To fulfill this agenda, the first step that can be undertaken is legal literacy. In addition to this, if people are aware of the law and their rights, they will have the confidence, which will lead to efficacy in their working segment, which may be in any field. One of the easiest and the best way to spread legal awareness in huge set is social media.

LEGAL LITERACY

It is necessary to go through the concept of literacy to understand the meaning of legal literacy. Literacy can be described as the ability to read and write in all languages according to the Ministry of Home Affairs.ⁱⁱ Literacy is the capacity to define, comprehend, recognize, perceive, develop, interact and compute with written and printed materials in different contexts.ⁱⁱⁱ Literacy involves learning constantly, so that people can accomplish their aspirations, grow their knowledge and abilities, and participate fully in their communities and societies.^{iv} Legal awareness also known as Public Legal Education, is to encourage individuals to deal with the different legal issues that promote knowledge of and thus enable them to participate in the process of establishing the rule of law and the philosophy of law. The learning is different from the curriculum at law schools and regular vocational training of lawyers and magistrates since it applies to the general examination of legal questions and doesn't get into the details. Legal education makes it possible for people at all levels of their life to demand justice, consistency and redress. It helps legal problems to be recognized and expected and takes the required and effective steps to avoid these problems. If a person knows his or her rights and has brevity in his or her rule, he or she can consult and advise lawyers easily in time and can therefore face and avoid the crisis in its entirety. It is well known that lack of legal knowledge enhances the impact of legal disorders and issues as they arise. Therefore, the lack of legal awareness and legal problems seem to be greater than they really are and make the person feel intimidated. Legal literacy is primary process of making people aware of the legal provisions to help them to get justice for their own.

SOCIAL MEDIA IN SOCIETY: AN EASY INFORMATION GETTER

Social media plays a significant role in awareness establishment. It provides the finest means to communicate with many organizations in the present world. It involves the use of social networks such as Televisions, face book, websites among other broadcasting techniques. Social networks provide a perfect social environment where people can communicate and share their ideas. Social media interaction covers a broad scope, as many people can access

information on a Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, Youtube, etc. And the best part of social media is unlimited number of people can access it. The posted data can be circulated over a short period to many people. Technological advances have played an important role in improving communication with social media. People who are far from one another can interact as if they are nearby. Several organizations have used the social media to remind the public about their agenda.^v

Social media is one of the easiest ways to get information. It is not just used by literate or economically well doing people. It is wide spreading that everyone in each house use social media in one or the other way. People may not be aware of their rights provided in the Constitution of India but everyone is well versed in the usage of Tik-tok. Youngsters are addicted to Facebook and Instagram. All the information in social media can reach a huge number of people within a second. This is the power of social media. This power can be used in a better way by spreading legal awareness so that the injustices to people can be questioned.

LEGAL LITERACY AND SOCIAL MEDIA

India, the world's largest democracy, needs to be aware that the freedoms are informed to make people live in compliance with real democratic rules and with the rule of law.^{vi} The main in law level of legal literacy is commonly understood. If individuals, particularly oppressed and vulnerable communities, know what the law can provide, they can much more actively accept and question injustices. Legal literacy is the first step toward that understanding of law that can transform human lives.^{vii} Social media being the best mode to affect the people, it is the quickest way to make people understand law.

Social media has proved to be the most powerful influence for all, and the effect on different strata of society has far surpassed. It's all reached a point in which random people in far corners of the world decide on our feelings, responses and reactions to various incidents: the ability

to instigate or stifle collective indignation aimed at specific instances or individuals. The change also has not escaped the rule of law, and social media play a major role in defining and amending India's legal system.^{viii} Most interestingly, by publishing news, judgments and laws in different social networks, it has made a lot of legal consciousness available, allowing most people to become acquainted with values and laws they would not have come to know otherwise.^{ix} The people who need information about their rights need not get into any scholarly articles, they can simply access any law-specific social media page which saves their time and also easily understandable.

Social media is an important player in raising awareness of existing legislation and promoting a change in law. Social Media has promoted awareness among the people about their rights indirectly. But there are no actual legal awareness campaigns taken place in India. However, it is definite that the legal awareness campaign initiated by social media will be a success as there are various social awareness campaigns which were a huge success and people were not only interested to know about their rights but also to fight for it. Some of such campaigns are as follows:

1. Nirbhaya- The Delhi Gang Rape Case

An event that shook the minds of the masses and literally forced everybody to condemn the lethargically framework of the Indian Judiciary, and which shook the very core of the judiciary's functioning. The 23-year-old medical student who was raped by gang and fatally assassinated on a bus in Delhi on 16 December 2012 asked the fundamental question of women's safety.^x The case wouldn't have been widely discussed had the social media not played an active role in turning the event into a public debate. Facebook and Twitter played an important role in highlighting not only the rage of the public but also the strongest forum in which people expressed their anger and frustration at the government's indifference to the incident. Most reporters also were allowed to use Facebook and Twitter to track events and to test the activists' input. "Twitter was really helpful to get an understanding of public sentiment and growth," an Australian reporter said.^{xi} He took the hashtag #delhigangrape, the Indian Government's official Twitter report, women's groups, press organizations and Indian

media.^{xii} Facebook was the only place that formed strong groups of opinion and posts became in seconds viral or people demonstrated their support for Nirbhaya by turning the Facebook profile picture into a black dot. If it wasn't for social media, Nirbhaya Act wouldn't have passed and women would have never gotten to know about the rights guaranteed to them by law.

2. *Turkey's Twitter*

In Turkey's major case, a woman was brutally killed as she tried her best to defend herself and avoid the rapist. The event immediately caused mass protests in Turkey and inspired many more Turkish women to participate in social media reporting of cases of women's abuses, murder and sexual harassment of all kinds. In an article written by E.D.Octerman called as "Rape Survivors talk about why they tweeted their stories"^{xiii} many significant points were made. The article raised an extremely important question asking if any type of talk of sexual assault on social media helps victims cure their pain and rather hurts them.^{xiv} The article outlines a case of Jo Anne Cusick^{xv}, who, at the age of 8 years of age sadly with no bravery at the time, had to deal with sexual harassment but who after 28 years posted the message on social networks and joined the group of 100 other survivors who also tweeted about their sexual harassment tales.^{xvi} The victims all answered a simple question of what they used to wear when attacked. The posts quickly became viral and sparked a large discussion on social media and blogs among victimizers that sharing stories on public social media sites was a truly positive step in the process of recovery. The controversy started when Christine Fox, a young woman who frequently tweeted @steenfox,^{xvii} had to face an assertion by a supporter that all these attacks were carried out by women, who often wore short and revealing clothes and then assaulted. She disagreed strongly by stating that many raped women were dressed decently with a hashtag: #RapeHasNoUniform.^{xviii} There are many instances in which women have shared their sufferings and struggles on twitter and never have been scared of it, because they feel strongly that sharing these stories across social media platforms would make women more vigilant, stronger and brave and provide them with a lesson that they cannot trust anyone. It has actually been reported that women users of social media have increased dramatically, indicating clearly the true power of social media. Women were the right users of social media,

be it to raise their painful stories or to provoke thought on various questions related to women's atrocities or gender.

3. *Rape in Uber cab- Women beware*

A terrible incident in Delhi again shook and challenged the fundamental issue of protection for women from Delhi as the rape of a 27-year-old finance manager in Gurgaon.^{xix} A taxi driver raped her at the age of 27 as she came back from a dinner party in Gurgaon. Some of the headlines, titled "Delhi Rape: Twitter inundated with nasty messages about Uber,"^{xx} was brought about by this incident. Social media played a very active part in the case and Twitter's comments and opinions gave the public time to think about the issue of women's safety in hired taxis. Uber had trouble winning back the customer's trust since its reputation on the market was hurt by mass uproar on social media. The messages sent by former Uber Cab users in Twitter were overwhelmed, who said they were all deleting the request and refusing to make use of its services. This would not have brought into picture if the social media hadn't been existed.

4. *India campaign on Oxfam*

Oxfam India shared the trendy campaign named, "We can Campaign towards reduction of violence against women and for political empowerment"^{xxi} and launched, "The Close the Gap Campaign in Social Networking" like social networking sites having the tagline, "Indian's demand equality for women"^{xxii}. The campaigns were very successful in reaching people, particularly rural India, through their interactive system of response that encourages social media users to also voice their views in the form of conversations about gender issues and equal treatment.^{xxiii} This helped in understanding the rights against discrimination and right to equality to people.

5. *Campaign against domestic violence*^{xxiv}

This was a very common initiative to combat domestic violence and a successful one. The campaign called on the locals to stand firmly and severely against domestic violence by means of simple acts designed to interrupt all types of domestic violence in their vicinity.^{xxv} Either

tea or a water glass could be borrowed. The campaign gave a very clear signal that people would prove to the perpetrators through such actions that they are aware of such violence against women and that they can take such action. This campaign made the people aware of the existence of domestic violence and their right against it.

These are social awareness created by social media among the Indian and made them realize about the rights and duties as such in India.

Pakistan has conducted a legal awareness campaign through social media to guide their people on rights and obligations.^{xxvi} In detail, In the class of civil justice, Pakistan ranks at the bottom. In a World Justice Project survey conducted in 2017 with Gallup Pakistan, made it clear that the confidence in the judiciary is very low among Pakistani people, and even the small fractions of conflicts that come to its resolution are not handled by the state-sponsored court system. Nevertheless, a project for social media with the hashtag #QanoonSabKayLiye (Law for everyone) aims to change the situation in Pakistan by increasing legal literacy. Insaaf Camp, an association that holds seminars and camps for the legal knowledge market, launched the initiative.^{xxvii} The initiative of a not-for-profit organization, Courting the Law, is a web portal for legal advice. However, the campaign #QanoonSabKayLiye is a series of Facebook and Twitter postings that explain the rights and duties of the people under Pakistan's constitution.^{xxviii} The initiative involves laws concerning abortion, sexual harassment, trafficking, bribery, etc.

This kind of legal awareness campaign should also be conducted among Indians, so that it is not about them having just the knowledge of their rights and obligations but also the forum under which a suit can be filed if there is a particular form of injustice

Conclusion

Legal literacy is essentially an ability to understand the legal problems that affect the society in which we live and motivate individuals in relation to legal issues. This helps people to

become aware of their various legal rights, such as their political rights, rights to education, etc. There are so many Legal aid initiatives taken by the government for the protection of marginalized people. Yet legal aid is less effective and purposeful without legal literacy. To increase that legal literacy, social media is the main key. Legal awareness projects, training programs for paralegals, social advocacy against injustice and abuse, out - of-court dispute settlement, legal advice, etc. through social media are some ways in which those in need can understand and learn about their own significance in shaping and rejuvenating this great nation.

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