



## **LEGAL LITERACY AS A TOOL OF EMPOWERMENT - ASSESSING HOW LEGAL EDUCATION SHAPES CHILDREN'S AGENCY AND FAMILY RIGHTS IN CONTEMPORARY JURISDICTIONS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper takes a look at the transformative potential legal literacy has in empowering children to understand, claim, and exercise their rights in the family and society. The research places legal literacy in the context of human rights, educational policies, & welfare of the child to showcase how law awareness enhances children's agency & equality and democracy possible in family relations. By employing the UNCRC and cross-case studies from India, UK, & Scandinavian countries, this study assesses the development of legal education policies & inclusion of rights-learning approaches in pedagogy from a child rights perspective. This study deems how legal literacy can alleviate prescriptive inequalities, curb child exploitation, and bolster participative decision-making in schools and homes. This includes a nuanced engagement of pedagogy, law, and social justice that describes how the distribution of legal literacy can reorder the family's internal structure, enhance protective rights of children, and advance their rights and participatory democracy. The objective of this study is to demonstrate that teaching legal literacy is an educational effort that serves the enduring purpose of empowering learners so that children are able to actively engage in shaping their legal realities.

*Keywords - Legal Literacy, Child Agency, Family Law, Child Rights, Empowerment, Education, Human Right, Access to Justice, UNCRC, Social Justice.*



Legal literacy is the first step in connecting the legal system to the people. It is the ability to read legal documents, as well as the right to understand the relations of rights and obligations in everyday life. Legal literacy for children goes beyond its functional use; it serves to liberate children from passively depending on adults and to actively empower them as players in the legal and family system. In a time with more inclusive human rights, legal literacy for children is the first step to participatory democracy & protection of basic civil liberties (Thomas, 2013).

Following the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989, more attention was placed on children's legal rights. Articles 12 and 13 of the Convention highlight the child's right to express an opinion & right to information, and Article 29 places an obligation on the State to educate toward the dignity of human rights, & principles of justice and equity. These articles recognize the importance of rights awareness in their realization. Legal literacy serves as a tool to connect the aspirations of international law & lived realities of children (Smith, 2021). Children's legal agency, which, in a broad sense, is the ability of children to make choices, and express and influence views and decisions, has strongly been dismissed by historical legal systems that saw children as incompetent. This 'protectionist' strategy of the law failed to recognize children's potential, & comprehension of the law and justice as a positive factor for their empowerment and social inclusion, is now a legal, educational, and social paradigm shift.

Wisdom about the law provides the means through which children can gain agency, perhaps the most crucial type of agency in our society. When children grasp the laws about education, family, and protection from abuse, legal literacy provides them with the awareness of the entitlements and responsibilities that come with those laws. Knowledge of anti-bullying policies, gender equity laws, and protections against domestic violence enables children to report breaches and seek justice. This awareness creates confidence, autonomy, & willingness to contest exploitative and discriminatory practices that may exist in families and institutions (Kala et. al., 2023).

In India, some school programs trying to anchor legal literacy are the NALSA's Legal Literacy Clubs, & Child Rights Education programs by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights. These programs aim to teach children the fundamentals of the Constitution, as well as



laws related to child rights, child labour, sexual offences, and rights under the Right to Education Act, 2009. Research by UNICEF and UNESCO suggests that these kinds of programs encourage reporting of abusive situations, and engaging in community decision-making. Legal literacy, especially in relation to human rights, is integrated into civic education in Sweden and Norway, and focuses on rights of children, consent, and equality before the law. The Scandinavian approach is particularly commendable as it combines the learning of legal concepts and civic responsibility with emotional literacy, self-confidence, and active participation in society (Garje, 2011).

Legal education plays a role in shaping children's agency in society even outside the classroom. Informal socialization of the law happens through the media, the internet, and local community efforts. For example, the legal education mobile apps and children's help lines that provide legal information in easy language become valuable tools of learning. Such tools help even children living in poverty understand and access information about their rights. Legal literacy in these contexts is more about participation and experience, rather than the legal code and texts (Legal Education Review, 2016).

### **LEGAL LITERACY AND FAMILY RIGHTS - A PATHWAY TO SOCIAL JUSTICE**

The interplay of legal literacy and family rights is complex. Families are the primary social units in which children experience authority, obligations, and justice. Families are also where children can experience violations of their rights, including neglect, violence, and forced labour. In such situations, knowing a law or having legal awareness may help a child improve their situation. When children understand that the law provides them with rights which they can exercise independently, such as the rights to education and health as well as to express, and work under the protection of the law against exploitation, they feel empowered to challenge violations, even within the problematic hierarchies of authority in a family (Tomlinson, 2011).

Since 2002, schools in UK have included Citizenship Education. Designed to prepare young learners for the legal and political systems, including the principles of family law, the curricula focus on conflict resolution, equality, and social justice. Children are asked to think about family relationships in a context of respect, law, and accountability. The same applies to Australia. The Human Rights Education Framework connects legal literacy to family well-



being by teaching young learners about consent, bodily autonomy, and parental rights and responsibilities (Gibson and Grant, 2017).

Most developing nations, on the other hand, even in rural and economically backward areas, continue to live with a lack of legal awareness among the children. In India, conservative and patriarchal traditions and cultural taboos limit rights talk, gender, and sexuality rights, especially. The absence of legal education within school systems means children are uneducated about protective laws, such as POCSO Act, 2012 and prohibitions on child marriage. The un-educated legal awareness continues to fuel silence, dependency, and vulnerability (Goyal and Goni, 2020).

Legal literacy has the potential to serve as a counter-hegemonic tool within families. It shifts the balance of power and permits children to have informed conversations with their parents and guardians. This knowledge does not encourage disobedience; rather, it promotes positive dialogue because children will have the means to express their views in a legally informed manner. This also helps parents understand their responsibilities and avoid violating rights inadvertently. Thus, legal literacy has a dual purpose; it empowers children and fosters a rights-awareness culture within families (Task Force, 1992).

On a larger scale, legal literacy also fulfills social justice needs. When children grasp the concepts of equality, fairness, and non-discrimination as articulated in the Constitution and laws, they learn and own them as values that will help shape them to be the next generation of rights-bearing citizens. Internalized culture is crucial in eradicating deeply rooted inequalities, such as, gender-based injustices, caste discrimination, and economic exploitation. Legal awareness has the potential to change the social fabric of developing democracies. Legally aware children will always advocate for the right to know & right to access. Moreover, change agents empower their communities by raising awareness and educating parents and peers. This is called “reverse socialization”. This illustrates the balance of power with the legal awareness of children & enabling of intergenerational social learning (E, 2018). In the context of SDG 16, which aims for peace, justice, and strong institutions, legal awareness of children positively impacts social change. Children empowered with the knowledge of their rights will strengthen positive democratic citizenship and participation, accountability, and social inclusive governance (Ankit, 2023).



## **COMPARATIVE LEGAL FRAMEWORKS ON LEGAL LITERACY AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS**

Analyzing the approaches of various jurisdictions regarding the institutionalization and conceptualization of legal literacy for children allows an understanding of its transformative potential. Around the world, the integration of legal education into formal school systems is not uniform, and this is due to variations in socio-political climates, legal systems, and educational frameworks. A comparative study of India, the UK, & Nordic countries, particularly Sweden and Norway, presents different approaches to the same end: empowering children as informed rights-holders.

Legal literacy, and more broadly the empowerment of children, is an objective, especially in India's developing democracy. Sections 3 and 4 of the National Policy for Children, 2013, in conjunction with the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, underscore education as a means to inculcate constitutional values and awareness of rights (Dubey, 2010). In addition, NALSA, under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, has established several Legal Literacy Clubs in schools and community centers, and these clubs mobilize children to learn about important legislation like the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986, the POCSO Act, 2012, & Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015.

However, as a result of institutional attempts, implementation continues to remain ineffective. Volunteer efforts are what constitutes legal literacy programs in India with no incorporation into institutional school programs. Also, caste systems, gender discrimination, and child marriage traditions as socio-cultural obstacles continue to hinder children in exercising their rights. Consequently, the legal education offered in India is patchy, and continues to be, inequitable as is the overall education system. Still, it is a positive development that civil society organizations engaging with rights advocacy, such as Centre for Child Rights and Save the Children India, seek to integrate rights education into both the formal and informal educational structures (Grewal and Singh, 2011).

The UK has taken a more systematic approach in this respect. The incorporation of Citizenship Education into the National Curriculum was a monumental leap toward the coupling of legal education with civic education. Within this framework, children are taught about democratic



institutions, the justice system, rights, & responsibilities of citizenship. The interactive techniques recommended in the guidance provided by the Education Department, which include debates, and simulations of parliaments and courts, are designed to deepen insight about justice and equality (What is Citizenship education?, n.d.).

The Equality Act, 2010 also serves as the foundation for discussions in the classroom on the topics of fairness and rights, and consolidates anti-discrimination provisions (Humpfreys, 2010). These values are also strengthened by activities provided by this country's branch of Amnesty International's Human Rights Education Project and UNICEF. In particular, the RRSA framework assists schools in establishing rights-respecting environments in which children are taught to understand and actively apply the principles of the UNCRC in their everyday dealings and relationships. Evaluations indicate that children in RRSA schools are more empathetic, less prone to bullying, and more peaceful in resolving conflicts, and these evaluations support the more constructive claims.

The Scandinavian countries, particularly Sweden, Norway, and Denmark, are outstanding examples of legal literacy and participatory democracy integration. These social democracies are based on the premise that children are not dependents of their adults, but rather are active participants in their societies. Legal literacy is fostered as children learn the principles contained in the Constitution along with the Civic and Social Studies curriculum and lessons that require them to do activities. An example is the Swedish Education Act, 2010, which requires that education promote human rights, democracy, and equality.

Norway developed the Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC) framework with the Council of Europe based on the importance of learning through discussions & application of legal reasoning to problem solving. This type of pedagogy participation fosters understanding and builds responsibility. In addition to this, these countries ensure legal literacy is bolstered with access to child ombudsman institutions, where children can directly file a complaint or ask a question, underpinning the enforcement of rights education. In the world of legal literacy, the Nordic model is unique for incorporating legal literacy into education as both a content and process of education. The system builds a culture of participation and critical thinking that empowers children as active agents of justice and equality (Schattschneider, 1956).



**HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION & DEVELOPMENT OF LEGAL AWARENESS  
CENTERED ON THE CHILD**

Legal literacy initiatives are developed based on the concept of human rights education (HRE) across different jurisdictions. HRE is described in the UN Declaration of Human Rights Education and Training, 2011 as learning about human rights, through human rights, and for human rights. This triadic framework when applied to children ensures they acquire legal knowledge and practice rights as a social and ethical responsibility (E. M., 2022)

In the world over, the UNESCO Global Citizenship Education initiative promotes integration of human rights and legal awareness into school curricula. In India, this is aligned with the spirit of the National Education Policy, 2020, which promotes multidisciplinary education to nurture public empathy, and inclusive citizenship. However, notwithstanding the progressive intent, the NEP remains sluggish in implementation, particularly in the public schooling system. In contrast, UK & Scandinavian models ensure uniformity and accountability in the integration of learning human rights through government mandates (Ismail et al., 2024)

UNICEF's Child-Friendly Schools Framework is an example of rights-based pedagogy in practice. Schools adopting this model focus on legal literacy principles of inclusivity, participation, and safety. Research indicates that children involved in HRE programs, and thus legal literacy themselves, tend to actively challenge discrimination, and abuse, and support peers that face injustice (Mandiudza, 2013). The growth of digital education has changed the opportunities available for cultivating legal awareness. Children today engage with digital ecosystems that contain both opportunities and risks. Powerful tools for spreading legal literacy exist in the form of interactive games, animated explanations of legal concepts, and child-friendly databases on legal rights. Unfortunately, children are also exposed to threats like cyberbullying, exploitation, and misinformation.

The EU's GDPR, especially the child Data Protection provisions (Art. 8), sets global standards. The UK's Age-Appropriate Design Code, 2020 ensures that children's digital experiences are offered with provisions for transparency and privacy. These legal standards can also serve as tools for pedagogy, as schools are encouraged to inform students about the rights and responsibilities that accompany digital participation (Elvy, 2024).



Educating individuals on human rights in a participatory format rather than a passive one greatly impacts their empowerment in the long run. The participatory classrooms outlined in the Council of Europe's Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship enable students to gain confidence in civic and legal institutions. Within the context of school programs, students learn the procedural and moral law through mock trials, student parliaments, and even restorative justice programs (Ververi, 2017). For example, Finland practices restorative justice in schools by integrating mediation and dialogue. Rather than punitive problem-solving, this justice program engages students and fosters understanding of justice, empathy, and fairness. These values are foundational to legal literacy. Similarly, mock Lok Adalat and legal awareness camps by NALSA in India allow students to engage with the processes of the justice system.

### **BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTATION**

Although legal literacy is gaining strong global momentum, there are still systemic obstacles to the achievement of this goal, including curricular Inflexibility; in several countries, legal literacy is still standing as an add-on activity rather than integrated into the curriculum. The shortage of trained educators and legal resources, particularly in rural and underfunded schools, limits the reach of programs. Patriarchal and hierarchical order discourages children from questioning authority and discussing their rights, as structured in deeply rooted cultures. When children have reading impairments or disabilities, legal concepts are often expressed using jargon that they find understandable. Disparities in tech access are barriers to digital legal literacy disproportionately affecting learners in rural areas compared to urban centers. Meeting these challenges calls for systemic policy changes that center rights-based education, improve educator preparation, and foster partnerships between state agencies, civil society, and global actors (Gaudart, 1990).

Establishing legal literacy for children goes beyond pedagogical change. It is a mechanism to democratize social relations. It enables children to become empowered, rights-bearing citizens, fosters independent thought, and instills a sense of responsibility in their families and communities. Rights education transforms the intergenerational power relations in societies where children are sidelined from legal discourse. The legal systems of a society are a reflection of the prevailing social order. Legal literacy nurtures advanced civic dispositions and transforms society as children internalize the principles of justice and equality. It widens the





## **INSTANCES AS TO LEGAL LITERACY AND EMPOWERMENT IN PRACTICE**

When examining how legal literacy affects children's agency and their relationships within the family, the transformative effect & boundaries of the impact become clear. Experiences from different parts of the world, like India, UK, and Norway, show that although the contexts may differ, legal literacy always results in increased self-confidence in children and promotes their active participation in relationships within the family and in the wider community. Legal literacy results in positive changes in the overall dynamics of families and communities.

One of the prominent examples is the Legal Literacy Club Initiative, which started under NALSA's Legal Services Program, 2014 and now operates in schools in various Indian states. These clubs, through storytelling, role-play, and games, introduce kids to basic rights, laws on child labour, & POCSO Act. Program evaluations in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra showed that students participating in the programs had greater confidence in approaching teachers and other authorities when it involved rights violations. Also, among the students, the most noticeable change was in the understanding of rights in relation to early marriage and violence in the domestic sphere (Alam, 2025).

At the community level, projects like Centre for Child Rights' Bal Adhikar Shala (Child Rights Schools) have implemented a rights-based approach to education that emphasizes participation and equality. Through mock gram sabhas (village assemblies) children learn the workings of local self-governance and how to advocate for the fortified school facilities, & toilets of school and community to be of proper sanitation for girls. This localized form of legal literacy has empowered children and changed the attitude of their parents. Many parents reported taking greater responsibility for their children's educational and health rights after participatory awareness sessions (Rizvi, 2008).

There continue to be challenges to be addressed. There still exist basic socio-economic inequities, a lack of resources, and limited funding to develop and sustain programs guided by a rights-legal and content structure. In addition, many educators working in rural and isolated schools still require training and educational materials to develop rights-educators' competencies. As such, it would be incorrect to claim that socio-economic inequalities have



not persisted, yet India has shown that even in very limited form civil rights education has a real, positive and powerful impact to change power inequalities that may exist within a family and broader community.

The Rights Respecting Schools Award (RRSA) model created by UNICEF UK is legal literacy and child development is one of the most comprehensive programs in the world. Achieving the Award requires the adoption of the UNCRC in schools as the governance document, and for the curriculum and classroom interactions. Teachers and students devise and define classroom rules and responsibilities and classroom governance in a rights-based framework (Quennerstedt, 2022). Bullying and discriminatory issues in schools have seen a decline. Children have developed empathy and positive discrimination and conflict resolution skills. In addition, civic engagement has increased, and more rights have been shown to be understood, and respected. Studies also confirm that RRSA-accredited schools and programs have the most marked civics, empathy, and positive discrimination and conflict resolution skills as compared to schools that have not adopted the RRSA.

Through the RRSA model, families have acknowledged the more democratic relationships that can be developed with children. Many of the program's Parental Engagement workshops spark conversations around gender equity, discipline, consent relations, and other aspects of interpersonal family relationships. Teachers noticed students using legal and moral reasoning like fairness and equality in their arguments during family conversations. Moreover, alongside RRSA curriculum, UK Citizenship Education enhances students' understanding of court system, the functions of authority figures in the legal system, & concept of justice. Students participate in mock trials and engage in debates that teach them their rights & legal frameworks that protect those rights. The combination of knowledge and practical activities ensures that children's legal agency is rooted in realistic, practiced laws. Norway has a sophisticated model of child-centered legal education integrating pedagogy, social welfare, & legal system. Norwegian legal institutions & government regard children as legitimate participants in democracy and not only subjects of protection. This philosophy also appears in the school curriculum, & Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC) program includes legal and ethical reasoning in everyday exercises in school.

Norwegian schools also host "Children's Assemblies" (Barnas Storting) where students take on the roles of Parliament members and debate real issues like digital safety & environment.



This participatory system provokes critical thinking, justice, and reasoning. In addition, Norway has the Ombudsman for Children, the first of its kind, instituted in 1981. This office represents an institutional means for children to access and empower their rights. Children can file reports, ask for advice on issues within the family, and discuss legal matters surrounding custody, educational neglect, and education. This access promotes trust in the system and legal literacy (Graver, 2019).

## **LEGAL LITERACY & TRANSFORMATION OF FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS**

The reshaping of family relationships as a socio-legal unit of the family is one of the more profound consequences of legal literacy. There is a shift in the understanding of a family from a ‘private’ unit, insulated wholly from law and legal frameworks, but governed by morals or customs of the society, to a unit that must, and will, receive legal frameworks of governance, especially as the rights of children in the family unit increase (Tiwari and Singh, 2025).

Throughout history and in many societies, the family unit has been organized in a hierarchical structure, with children at the bottom and dependents. Legal literacy, however, seeks to transform this structure into one of partnership with mutual respect and communication. When children are aware of their legal rights, they will be more willing to engage in a dialogue to settle issues and will demonstrate respect at a more advanced level. For example, laws against corporal punishment and laws mandating that girls receive the same education as boys enable children to peacefully challenge family injustices and negotiate family norms in a non-violent manner.

UNESCO’s Global Education Monitoring Report, 2022 explains that the families of children who participated in rights-based education reported more democratic decision-making in the home. The parents’ consultation with children on issues such as health, education, and technology use & children’s role in decision-making reflect a shift, albeit small, in the balance of power (UNESCO, 2022). One of the key criticisms of legal literacy is that it will foster individualism and, in turn, alienate children from their families. Yet, research from India & UK points in the opposite direction. Informed children demonstrate more empathy and greater responsibility toward their families. Understanding their rights together with their duties, children will view the law as a framework for cooperation acting as a powerful unifying tool rather than an adversarial force.



Indian students involved in NALSA's programs, for instance, reported several times employing legal awareness to mediate disputes within families and to explain certain government schemes to their illiterate parents (Tiwari and Singh, 2025). In the UK, parents of students in RRSA schools reported having improved conversations and having less disputes with their children. Legal literacy promotes not rebellion but reconciliation. It helps reshape the law into another means of communication. Legal literacy programs aimed at children indirectly teaches their parents. When children learn about the rights that pertain to education, nutrition, and health, they often communicate these rights to their families. This 'bottom-up' approach works best in marginalized communities with low adult literacy. Plan India's "Learn Without Fear" campaign documented several instances of children encouraging their parents to remove their siblings from child labor and stop early marriage after attending school awareness programs (Murthi and Kapur, 2009).

Legal literacy is a form of social contagion. It promotes accountability, & conversation of law within private spaces is no longer a taboo topic. A family introduces a child to socialization & child learns the basics of justice within a family. With legal literacy, this space transitions from simply authoritarian to a joint educational arena. When children and parents know the legal principles within their family dynamic, a family unit becomes a microcosm of a democratic society, one that is not governed by fear or subordination, but understanding and respect. In that sense, legal literacy becomes philosophical as well as instrumental. It signifies the democratization of life on a daily basis. Informally, children actively participate in closing the divide that exists between a law in the public space and life in the private domain to make their home a place in which justice, equality, and compassion are not ideals to be wished for, but lived realities.

## **THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON LEGAL EMPOWERMENT AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS**

Legal empowerment and legal literacy are grounded in different theories that converge on the intersections of law, education, and sociology. From the perspective of human capabilities that Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum framed, literacy, and legal literacy, in particular, is not just a skill but a signed freedom that permits people to transform rights on a piece of paper into real opportunities. With respect to children, legal literacy enhances a child's ability to make



informed decisions and meaningfully engage in processes that determine their lives (Sugden, 1994).

Another applicable theory is Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, where education is seen as the process of liberation. Freire argued that education should not produce hierarchies but allow learners to question and challenge their oppression. Legal literacy is in sync with this pedagogy, as it provides children the tools to challenge the injustices that are imposed on them and on their families, schools, and communities. It shifts the child's position from a passive recipient of moral codes to an active participant in a moral conversation. In international law, the rights-based approach places legal literacy as a structural necessity. UNDP recognizes legal awareness as a component of access to justice for vulnerable populations. In this context, the right to know one's rights, alongside the other rights, is crucial for the realization of all other rights. This is a position captured in Art. 13 of the UNCRC, which guarantees access to information.

Carole Pateman and other theorists of participatory democracy assert that authentic democratic citizenship is predicated on early engagement with participatory institutions. By teaching children about rights and justice, the schooling becomes something more than civic education; it is preparation for democratic life. When children think about justice, resolve conflicts, adjust family rules, and take part in school governance, they exercise the micro-democratic principles of democracy in a democracy. As for the role of legal literacy, the recent global and regional data is encouraging in its ability to demonstrate the impact that legal literacy has on empowerment and family well-being. Data from UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report, 2023 indicate that children who undergo structured human rights or legal education programs are 42% more likely to report rights violations such as bullying, corporal punishment, and discrimination, compared to peers who do not participate in such programs. Furthermore, in schools where legal literacy was integrated into civic education, incidents of discrimination against girls decreased by 27% over a 3-year monitoring period. These findings indicate that awareness directly translates to significant changes in behavior and in the institution as a whole (UNESCO, 2023).

NCPCR's Evaluation Report on Legal Literacy Clubs, 2022 across ten Indian states indicates that 68% of participating students were able to talk about child-specific laws such as POCSO, the Right to Education Act, and prohibitions on child marriage, among others. Legal literacy improved among 53% of girls describing their legal rights then to refuse early marriage or



forced labor as slavery. Legal awareness of 71% of parents in these communities where such programs were operational influenced family decisions. Reported cases of child abuse within these communities increased by 35% demonstrating a greater legal literacy. These figures suggest confidence in the child protection legal system and an active trust and engagement with it (NCPCR, 2022).

In a similar vein, UK's UNICEF Impact Report, 2017 noted that students engaged in the Awards for Right Respecting Schools (RRSA) initiatives showed a 24% leap in civic engagement & 15% increase in family communication, indicating a greater trust and healthy dialogue in families. Such figures illustrate that legal literacy does not just safeguard children, but also positively alters family relations and builds a robust democratic spirit in society (UNICEF, 2017).

Empowerment hinges on education and awareness, as the Indian judiciary has so long maintained. For instance, in *Bandhua Mukti Morcha v. Union of India* ((1984) 3 SCC 161), court held that “right to life and dignity” as guaranteed in Art. 21 of Constitution includes access to information and awareness regarding one's legal entitlements. Court also stated that ignorance of rights leads to exploitation and emphasized that legal literacy should be a responsibility of the State.

In *Unnikrishnan, J.P. v. State of Andhra Pradesh* ((1993) 1 SCC 645), court inferred “Right to Education” from Art. 21, explaining that citizens cannot exercise their rights meaningfully without education. This reasoning is applicable to children's access to education, particularly legal education, to ensure equality and justice, as this is the foundation of every child's law education.

In *Laxmi Kant Pandey v. Union of India* ((1984) 2 SCC 244), and in the context of inter-country adoptions, court declared that children should be treated as “individuals with rights, not property of parents”. This strengthens the principle of child agency. In *Gaurav Jain v. Union of India*, ((1997) 8 SCC 114), court mandated the State to formulate rehabilitation of children with an awareness and legal protection component. The legal protection component would be aimed at children. The combined effect of these holdings is to establish the constitutional right to legal justice and, in this sense, legal literacy.



Children's rights to participation in family and welfare matters has, in every UK jurisdiction, been part of rulings. In *Gillick v. West Norfolk and Wisbech Area Health Authority* ([1986] AC 112), the House of Lords decided that a minor able to understand the implications of a medical procedure has the right to give independent consent, thus establishing the principle of "Gillick competence." This case is pivotal in asserting, for the first time in case law, that children can exercise legal agency, and in this instance, it is because of maturity rather than the absence of it, thus highly resonating with the objectives of legal literacy.

The *Sahin v. Germany* (App. No. 30943/96) case is, however, pivotal for the ECHR jurisprudence on the right of children to be heard in family cases and, consequently, to be part of the right to respect family life according to Art. 8 of the ECHR. The ECHR's emphasis on participation and informed consent embodies the objectives of legal literacy programs that prepare children to engage meaningfully with legal institutions.

## CONCLUSION AND A WAY FORWARD

Described initiatives aimed at equipping people with legal knowledge have a positive effect on people in a community as a whole. As people in a community become legally knowledgeable, there is a 'sense of justice and equality that the expectations of children and families & relationships between families and authority, duty, and care are transformed.' Especially in places like India, where children's voices are often socially muted, legal knowledge allows children to assert their rights while preserving the community culture. In established democracies, it reinforces the legacy of democracy by ensuring every new generation has not only an educated knowledge of the law but also a belief in the law's moral legitimacy. Examples of legally knowledgeable families exercising their rights and access to justice provides legal knowledge to families and children. In an empowered family, the equilibrium of society is transformed. Legal literacy is the cause & outcome of the justice system. When legal literacy is the outcome of an improved justice system, it sustains the rule of law in everyday life.

Legal literacy expands beyond its technical definition and becomes an imperative for social justice when looked at from the perspective of empowerment. Teaching children the tools needed to understand, interpret, and apply the law empowers societies to create not only civic citizens but also caring individuals who take active part in building just societies. The legal



principles from all countries confirm this, the law works best when it is understood, and understanding it begins with literacy. Legal literacy does not sit on the fringe of educational objectives; it is a constitutional imperative. It embodies the principles of equality, dignity, and justice, to be enjoyed from the very beginning of life. Children, equipped with this knowledge, are no longer passive subjects of protection but proactive builders of a civilized and orderly society.

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