

## **From Constitutional Principles to Educational Realities: India's Right to Education Act**

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Education is a fundamental element of societal advancement, a powerful catalyst that may influence the fate of countries. It is a core principle that governs human engagement and interaction with society, and facilitates the development of human intelligence. This analysis examines the development and execution of the Right to Education Act (RTE) within the constitutional structure of India. The Act, implemented in 2009, represents India's dedication to provide costless and obligatory education for children between the ages of 6 and 14. This abstract examines the process of transforming abstract constitutional principles of equality and justice into concrete educational prospects that are available to everyone. The text explores the fundamental principles that form the basis of the RTE Act, analysing its legal basis and the responsibilities it imposes on the government. In addition, the abstract examines the difficulties and accomplishments in implementing the RTE Act, assessing its influence on educational availability, excellence, and fairness among various socio-economic groups. Using a critical perspective, this analysis examines how well the constitutional goals of education fit with the actual implementation of educational services. It highlights the continuous attempts to bridge the divide between theoretical ideas and practical reality in India's education system.

**Keywords:** Education, Right to Education Act, Indian constitution, Article 21A, Empowerment

## **Introduction**

The advancement of the nation's society and economy depends on a well educated population. The education scheme in India has seen notable disruptions throughout its history and continues to evolve as a multifaceted and ever-changing process. Within the deliberations of the Constituent Assembly, the notion of establishing compulsory and costless education as a fundamental right was originally put up. Although it was widely acknowledged that there were two different categories of rights, namely justiciable and non-justiciable, there was controversy regarding the precise classification of the right to education (Rao, 2004). According to Article 21 A of the Indian Constitution, the 86th Constitutional Amendment Act of December 2002 enshrines the provision of free and compulsory education as a basic right. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 was passed on August 4, 2009, with the objective of efficiently implementing India's basic Right to Free and Compulsory Education. It was created as a last-ditch effort to address the substantial inequalities that existed in the realm of elementary education. The Act aims to ensure equitable access to education for all persons, enabling them to engage in studies and reap its benefits. This paper aims to highlight the legal framework of the Right and critically examine the clauses of the Act.

## **Right to Education as an Empowerment**

Before delving into the evolution of the right to education in India, it is crucial to grasp its importance for the country's residents. This right may be claimed as a fundamental entitlement that empowers individuals to enhance their own lives and situations. Jack Donnelly and Rhoda Howard coined the term "survival rights" to differentiate between various categories of rights, including "membership rights," "protection rights," and "empowerment rights." "Survival rights" encompass essential rights like the right to life, access to food, and healthcare, which guarantee the fundamental existence of individuals. The objective of "membership rights" is to ensure fair and equal inclusion of all individuals in society. Instances such as family rights and the restriction of discrimination are mentioned. Protection rights

function as a buffer against potential abuses of power by the state. Examples that demonstrate this include the right to habeas corpus and an independent judiciary. Empowerment rights pertain to the ability of citizens to exercise right over their own lives, encompassing influence over the acts of the state, rather than only depending on governmental protection. Illustrations of such entitlements encompass freedom of the media, freedom of assembly, and the entitlement to education. It is important to protect individuals against government attacks and also provide them the ability to shape and manage their own lives. Empowerment rights provide individuals the autonomy to take control of their own life. They enable individuals to participate in political, economic, social, and cultural domains. The inclusion of empowering rights is necessary for other fundamental human rights to be fully realized (Howard & Donnelly, 1988).

This right is regarded as an empowering entitlement owing to several considerations. Education has a substantial capacity for liberation, as well recognised. Educational institutions frequently function as tools for society control, enforcing intellectual conformity, rather than fostering creativity and autonomy and promoting personal liberation. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that despite strict regulation of the curriculum, the skills obtained at educational institutions may still be applied to generate concepts that may not be officially sanctioned by the government. This is demonstrated by the notable prevalence of well-educated persons among political dissidents in many countries worldwide. Education enables an individual to actively participate in critical analysis of life. It enables him to engage in deep reflection on possible courses of action and make sense of the reflection that follows (Howard & Donnelly, 1988).

Education symbolises political empowerment. The capability to fully experience and practice freedom of information, expression, assembly, and association, along with the right to vote and be elected, is contingent upon a necessary level of knowledge. Political engagement is restricted to persons who have the capacity to acquire knowledge, proficiently articulate their ideas, and unite to express their problems. Moreover, the capacity to make a well-informed decision and actively engage in the democratic process, such as casting a vote

or seeking political office, is solely restricted to persons with a significant degree of education. According to one source, governments may opt to not provide substantial resources to education owing to the possibility that highly educated and critical individuals may potentially challenge repressive regimes, thereby constituting a menace to their stability.

Furthermore, education serves a crucial part in promoting socioeconomic advancement. Education enables individuals to identify and achieve their economic and social human rights. For example, let us analyse the right to sustenance. Individuals may be provided with guidance on how to secure their personal food supply. Furthermore, additional entitlements that might be regarded as fundamental include the entitlement to gainful job, the entitlement to a reasonable standard of living, and the entitlement to healthcare. To fully exercise these rights, a certain level of knowledge is required. Ultimately, it is the person who has been educated in literacy that may acquire the awareness and expertise required to meet their own and their family's basic needs. Education promotes both economic and social integration. Individuals who lack reading skills are unable to fully participate in economic life and harness its potential. Education is a significant tool for disadvantaged youngsters to quickly move up the social ladder in almost every country.

Education eventually broadens individuals' opportunities to participate in cultural activities. Article 15 of the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights protects the right to participate in cultural activities. There exists a strong association between educational and cultural rights. The degree to which the right to education is achieved is intricately connected to the degree of fulfilment of cultural rights. Education has a key role in protecting the cultural identities of religious, linguistic, and ethnic minorities. The Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, which oversees the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, has officially confirmed the previously mentioned conclusions about the fundamental nature of the right to education. The committee's official declaration about this issue is as follows:

“Education is not only an essential entitlement in itself, but also a vital instrument for attaining other essential human rights.” Education, as a fundamental entitlement, is the principal means through which economically and socially disadvantaged individuals, both adults and children, can uplift themselves from poverty and acquire the necessary resources to actively participate in their societies. Education serves an integral part in supporting human rights and democracy, safeguarding children from dangerous and exploitative labor and sexual abuse, empowering women, preserving biodiversity, and controlling the growing population. Education is becoming seen as one of the greatest beneficial financial investments that nations can make. However, education possesses importance that extends beyond practical considerations. An educated, knowledgeable, and actively involved mind, free to discover and include a wide array of subjects, brings joy and satisfaction to the human existence. It may be deduced that the recognition of the right to education also promotes other essential human rights. The guarantee of education rights greatly amplifies the capacity to exercise various civil and political rights, as well as economic, social, and cultural rights. This right highlights the interdependence and indivisibility of all fundamental human rights.

### **Evolution of Education System in India**

The importance of education has always been underscored by eminent intellectuals throughout the history of India. The term ‘Vidya’, which refers to education, is sometimes symbolically equated to a ‘third eye’ for individuals, granting them profound comprehension of many subjects and directing their behaviour. It allows individuals to obtain salvation and promotes their general advancement and success in worldly affairs (Gupta, 2008). By the end of the 18th century, we had established our own educational system, which was spread through various institutions such as schools, colleges, and universities. Following India’s independence, the education system exhibited notable discrepancies in both the availability and standard of education among various areas. The system imparted education exclusively to a privileged minority, resulting in a substantial disparity between the educated and the uneducated. Educational inequity was exacerbated by economic discrepancy, gender imbalance, and inflexible social

hierarchies. Since attaining independence, there has been an increasing recognition that growth cannot be sustained without concurrent transformations in the approaches, values, knowledge, and abilities of the whole community. Education is universally recognised as the sole method to achieve this shift. In the conventional educational structure, formal education was confined to higher education institutions and a restricted number of elementary schools.

While our fundamental law of the land guarantees specific human rights for its residents, it distinguishes between Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of State Policy. According to Article 37 of the Constitution, the state is mandatory to execute the Directive Principles, which are essential for governing the country. However, they are not dependent on legal enforcement in any judicial system. Several arguments have emerged on the exact understanding of the linguistic expression employed in article 37. Historically, it has been felt that the rights specified in the Directive Principles are intended to be executed by the executive and legislative arms of the government, and should not be susceptible to judicial intervention (Minattur, 1975).

Article 45, which falls under the Directive Principles of the Constitution, bears significant importance in shaping the right to education, among other constitutional provisions. The original statement states that the State should make a focused effort to guarantee that all children receive compulsory education until the age of fourteen within ten years of the Constitution's start. It is to be noted that this is the only clause in the Directive Principles that includes a time limit, emphasising the framers' strong dedication to its execution. Since at least 1935, it has been specified that only the provinces in British India has the jurisdiction to enact legislation on education. During the process of drafting the constitutional provisions on education in the constituent assembly, the framers discussed whether education should be placed within the dominion of the union or concurrent lists. This would allow the federal government to pass laws related to education. Maulana Azad, who later became the first federal minister of education in independent India, vehemently opposed the full delegation of educational jurisdiction to the states. Nehru and other senior members of the constituent parliament endorsed his position. Azad argued that

transferring this competence to the central government was vital for establishing uniform educational standards across the country. However, a number of members of the drafting committee remarked that governments should have the authority to develop educational programmes and pass laws. They were driven, in part by the realisation that the many languages prevalent throughout India necessitated teaching in the native tongue, therefore necessitating a decentralised approach to education.

The situation was resolved by including education in the state list and adding provisions related to higher education and scientific and technical institutions in the union and concurrent lists. This gave the central government the authority to develop policies and pass laws regarding important aspects of education. Moreover, it was jointly agreed upon that the central government would have the authority to develop countrywide policies to efficiently coordinate the delivery of educational services.

After achieving independence, it appears that the central authorities in India did not prioritise education as a matter of national importance. Government data indicate that between 1951 and 1955, India allocated less than 1% of its entire GDP to public expenditure on education. In the years 1955-56, education expenditures exceeded 1% of the overall Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the first time. Nevertheless, this percentage remained within the range of 1% to 2% until 1979 (GOI, 2001). According to the previous succinct statistical study, there was no significant progress noticed during the next three decades. A constitutional amendment in 1976 resulted in a notable shift, transferring the responsibility of education from the state list to the concurrent list. The law sought to bolster the central government's preeminence in delivering educational services on a national scale, but without producing an immediate impact. India's literacy rate in 1991 stood at a modest 52.21 percent, which was comparatively modest when compared to other emerging countries (Jain, 2001). Thus, despite the passage of three decades beyond the given time in Article 45, it became clear that both the federal government and state governments were not making any advancement in achieving the purpose stated in Article 45 of the Constitution.

## **Provisions in the Constitution promoting and strengthening the educational framework in India.**

Our constitution has provisions that promote and enhance the educational structure of the country. Article 28 of the Constitution guarantees the freedom to engage in religious instruction or religious worship within educational institutions. Article 29 guarantees that individuals cannot be prohibited from entering any educational institution that is owned or funded by the government based on their race, caste, or language. Article 30 concerns the rights of minority communities to establish and supervise educational institutions. As to Article 45, the government has an obligation to guarantee that every child inside the nation receives compulsory and cost-free education until they reach the age of 14. This implementation should occur within a decade after the implementation of the Constitution. The provision of fundamental education falls under the purview of the state government, federal government, municipal governments, volunteer groups, and any other governmental institution. According to Article 46 of the Constitution, it is required to prioritise the elevation of education and economic well-being for Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes, Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and the economically disadvantaged segments of society (Government of India, 1950). Article 337 of the Constitution governs the explicit provision for educational subsidies that are intended to help the Anglo-Indian community. In addition, Article 350B provides resources and opportunities for linguistic minorities.

### **86<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act**

The primary objective of the eighty-sixth constitutional amendment was to protect and uphold the basic right of individuals to get an education. The Constitution underwent alteration with the addition of three additional amendments, aimed at improving its functionality and ensuring that pupils in the six to fourteen age range have the right to attain education that is both compulsory and free (GOI, 2002). The 86th Amendment Act brought about a substantial alteration by including a novel Article, 21A, into Part III of the Constitution. This article asserts that every kid has the right to obtain

compulsory and cost-free education of equivalent calibre, in harmony with defined standards and criteria. The amendment brought about changes to Article 45, which now emphasises the State's commitment to providing all children up to the age of six are entitled to free and compulsory early childhood care and education. Furthermore, as an outcome of this new primary duty, it introduced a new clause, (K), in Article 51A, which makes it obligatory for parents or guardians to guarantee educational opportunities for their child or ward between the ages of six and fourteen years (GOI, 2002).

On April 1, 2010, when it was put into effect, the Act made India one of the 135 countries that acknowledged education as a basic right for its people. It raised the right to education to the same level of importance as the right to life. This law necessitates all individuals, including parents, educational institutions, the community, state governments, and the federal government, to meet their responsibilities in providing compulsory and cost-free education to children aged 6 to 14. The act's objective is highly acclaimed by educators and is seen as a momentous milestone in the nation's pursuit to ensure universal access to fundamental education. In the case of *State of Tamil Nadu & Orvs K Shyam Sunder & Ors*, the court maintained that a child's right to education should not be limited to merely receiving free and compulsory education, but should include access to education of excellent standards, irrespective of their economic, social, or cultural background.

### **The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2009.**

This Right is a statutory enactment implemented on August 4, 2009, that emphasises and emphasises the need of granting costless and compulsory education to children aged 6 to 14 in India. India has become a member of the club consisting of 135 nations that recognise the right to education as a fundamental right for every ward in our Constitution, namely under Article 21A. This law was implemented on April 1, 2010 (Saini, 2014).

It is the accountability of governments to guarantee that everybody has equal access to basic education in order to preserve

the right to education. The 1990 World Declaration on Education for All asserts that these needs include indispensable learning tools (such as reading, speaking, math, and critical thinking) as well as the fundamental learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes) required for individuals to thrive, reach their maximum capabilities, live with dignity, actively participate in progress, improve their quality of life, and make informed choices. After a thorough process of drafting and updating, the right to education act was put into effect to fully meet the essential requirement for education and ensure equal opportunities for all children. The approach is based on four fundamental principles, referred to as the 4As, which delineate the precise areas that this legislation seeks to tackle.

**Accessibility** - Education is freely offered, with the government accepting the obligation of funding it. In addition, there are extensively skilled teachers that specialise in their particular fields, and the educational infrastructure is enough to support the educational system.

**Accessibility** is the equitable provision of education to all persons, irrespective of any kind of discrimination, with the primary objective of benefitting the most marginalised segments of society.

**Acceptability** - Education is highly regarded, free from bias, and widely embraced; the school environment is safe, and the teachers are suitably qualified.

**Adaptability** pertains to the capacity of education to be pliable and receptive to the evolving requirements of society and its individuals. Additionally, it contributes to the mitigation of disparities, such as gender bias.

### **Main Features of Right to Education Act**

This Law mandates that all children between the ages of six and fourteen have the privilege of receiving free and obligatory education at a nearby educational institution till they complete their primary education. The Act specifically stipulates that no child shall be compelled to bear any charges or penalties that might impede their capacity to access elementary education. The Right to Education Act (GOI, 2009) requires government or local authority-run schools to provide free and mandatory primary education to all pupils who are

enrolled. Furthermore, it is obligatory for all private schools to offer free education to at least 25% of disadvantaged pupils living in their vicinity. The apex Court upheld the legitimacy of the Right to Education Act, 2009 in the case of *Society for Un-Aided Private School of Rajasthan v. Union of India & Anr*<sup>72</sup>. This legislation guarantees that a quarter of the available spots in both government and private unaided schools across the country are set apart solely for economically disadvantaged pupils, without any cost or fees. Children who have either dropped out of school or have not gotten any proper education will be enrolled, and no educational institution will be able to refuse them admittance. The Act includes a provision to give specialist education to children who are not presently registered in any school or who have not completed their primary education up to the relevant grade level for their age. Furthermore, it mandates that any child with such characteristics will be entitled to receive specialist education.

Furthermore, as stated in Section 6 of the Right to Education Act, a school must be constructed within a designated period of time from the implementation of the Act in areas or communities where there is currently a lack of educational infrastructure. The financial duties for executing the provisions of the Act (GOI, 2009) will be shared by both the Central Government and the State Governments. According to Section 12(1c) of the Act, private unaided schools must admit pupils from economically disadvantaged and marginalised groups, constituting a minimum of 25% of their overall class capacity. As per Section 12(2) of the RTE Act, private unaided schools have the right to be reimbursed for their expenses. The reimbursement amount is limited to the lowest of either the per-child cost paid by the government or the actual fee collected for each student.

According to Section 13(1) of the Act, it is specifically prohibited for any institution or anyone to demand any capitation charge or impose any evaluation procedure on a child, their parents, or guardians. The aim of this clause is to safeguard equitable access to excellent primary education for all children aged six to fourteen. Furthermore, according to Section 2(o), institutions are required to apply only random techniques for accepting pupils. If the number of

students applying to a certain school exceeds the number of seats available, a lottery mechanism will be employed to distribute the seats using a random technique (GOI, 2009).

In the case of *Society for Un-Aided Private School of Rajasthan v. Union of India & Anr.*, the Supreme Court endorsed the validity of specific portions of the law that acknowledged the Right to Education as a fundamental entitlement for children aged 6 to 14. The law was enacted by putting Article 21A into the Constitution, which requires the government to provide free and compulsory education to all children aged 6 to 14, as mandated by statute. The Supreme Court bench, including Chief Justice S.H. Kapadia and Justice Swatanter Kumar, affirmed the constitutionality of Section 12(1c) of the RTE Act, which provides a 25% discount. The Court has affirmed the constitutionality of the RTE Act, 2009, which mandates that 25% of seats in government and private unaided schools throughout the country be set aside for pupils from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Section 24 of the Act delineates the fundamental obligations of teachers to augment their professionalism. These factors encompass maintaining a regular timetable and being prompt, completing the full curriculum within a certain timeframe, evaluating the learning capacities of individual students, and providing suitable teaching, including extra assistance as necessary. Teachers must periodically convene with parents and guardians to furnish them with crucial updates on their pupils' academic advancement. The RTE Act establishes regulations and benchmarks for multiple facets of education, including the optimal student-to-teacher ratio, specifications for school infrastructure, minimum number of school days, instructional hours per academic year, minimum number of working hours per week for teachers, provisions for library facilities, and guidelines for teaching or play materials. As per Section 18(1) of the Act, schools are obligatory to get a certificate of appreciation from a competent local government in order to operate. However, this may only be achieved if they adhere to the provisions outlined in Section 19 of the Right to Education Act. If a school is found to be in violation of the terms of its accreditation, the regulatory authority will revoke its certification.

The National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights (N.C.P.C.R.) and state commissions are responsible for supervising the operation of the Act. Before the R.T.E. Act was put into effect, the central government carried out several programmes including as five-year plans, SarvaSikshaAbhiyan (S.S.A.), Mid-Day Meal Scheme, and RashtriyaMadhmayaSikshaAbhiyan (R.M.S.A.) to encourage the universalization of primary education. To optimise the impact of this initiative in eradicating illiteracy, it is essential to rectify any shortcomings identified in previous programmes, closely monitor the contributions of different stakeholders, and take corrective actions to avoid any deviances from the established course towards achieving the desired result.

### **Criticism raised against the RTE Act**

A significant critique of the Act was its exclusion of children aged zero to six. During this phase, a child experiences important stages of growth. The optimal growth and development of the young individual would be hindered in the absence of ample opportunities. Moreover, there is concern about the quality of education. To effectively enforce Article 21-A of the Constitution, it is central to ensure that everyone have access to education of outstanding calibre. Most youngsters are not familiar with the majority of the content that is offered to them. There is an increasing necessity for more non-formal education that focuses on the learner's requirements and revolves on interactive activities. Moreover, there has been a significant surge in the quantity of private schools in recent years. Their infrastructure is robust, and they are effectively meeting the parents' expectations. Consequently, the majority of parents choose for private schools instead of state institutions. The issue of delivering education of superior quality remains unresolved in public schools, notwithstanding the enactment of the R.T.E. Act.

Moreover, the Act mandates the allocation of finances between the central government and the state governments to enable the effective execution of the Act. There is a substantial shortage of funds for execution. The government agency is responsible for determining the financial resources required to conduct free and

compulsory education in accordance with the RTE Act 2009. The distribution must be carefully organised in a series of consecutive steps. Efficient cooperation across diverse government agencies is crucial for the effective operation of government projects and to avoid duplication in the distribution of resources, utilisation of funding, and other relevant problems. In order to accomplish the stated objectives, it is necessary to advance the present monitoring methods and establish a comprehensive monitoring system that considers both academics and administration. Moreover, the Act faces criticism for its No Detention Rule, which is anticipated to impede students from achieving a high-caliber education. Section 16 of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (R.T.E.) Act, 2009 stipulates that no child enrolled in a school can be held back or disqualified from school until they have finished their basic education. The policy covers the fundamental stage of education, comprising classes 1 to 8.

Regarding the condition of Kerala and the challenges it has in implementing the Right to Education (RTE) provides valuable information on the diverse attributes of Indian states. As a result, policymakers face obstacles when creating a national legislation of this kind. Kerala achieved a PTR ratio of 26:1, surpassing the specified benchmark. The state government emphasises the discrepancy in Kerala's division-based pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) of 45:1, which exceeds the required ratio of 30-35:1 for the whole school. They claim to have already exceeded the required total PTR requirement. The majority of schools have already constructed their infrastructural facilities in accordance with the standards set out by the RTE Act. However, due to the difficulties in distributing financial resources for constructing and staffing schools based on the elementary classification specified in the RTE Act, the Kerala government has issued a directive declaring that upper primary schools with Class V will now be categorised as both lower and upper primary schools. Similarly, high schools that provide Class VIII will be categorised as both upper primary and high schools. This diverges from the conventional categorization, as lower primary education in Kerala stands out as an example model for the entire nation due to its remarkable literacy rates, which were already impressive before the enactment of the Act.

Nevertheless, there are concerns over the Act's distribution of funds via devolution. The state has already achieved the objective of guaranteeing universal access to education for persons up to the age of 16, and measures have been taken to provide free education up to the upper secondary levels. The RTE Act creates administrative complexity and incurs significant expenditures for the state under certain conditions.

### **Conclusion**

Although the RTE Act was implemented more than 13 years ago, it has not yet attained its intended efficacy and still has a considerable way to go. India, after 78 years of gaining independence, officially recognised education as a fundamental right. Nevertheless, the R.T.E. Act, which sought to ensure widespread availability of high-quality education, has mostly failed to accomplish this goal. The government should conduct a thorough evaluation of the R.T.E. Act, examining both its viability and execution. To simplify the implementation process, the government should explore further amendments to the R.T.E. Act. To ensure a good future for India, it is crucial that every child, regardless of their socioeconomic status, get a top-notch education. The R.T.E. Act has significant shortcomings that require correction, as it is the primary legislation that prioritises improving the quality of school education for children. The scope of the Right to Education Act should not be restricted to children aged 14 and below; it should be extended to include high school students as well. Creating a favourable environment and ensuring an abundant availability of resources will enhance the prospects for both individuals and the entire nation.

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