



UNNI KRISHNAN V. STATE OF ANDHRA PRADESH (1993)

Constitutional Interpretation & Basic Structure

PRELIMS SNAPSHOT

◆ 1. Prelims Snapshot (Fact Box)

- 📅 Year: 1993
- ⚖️ Case: Unni Krishnan, J.P. v. State of Andhra Pradesh
- 👤 Bench Strength: 5 Judges
- 📖 Key Articles Involved: Article 21, Article 41, Article 45, Article 46
- 🧠 Doctrine Evolved: Right to education is implicit in Article 21 up to the age of 14
- 💬 Famous Line: "Right to life and dignity cannot be assured unless accompanied by the right to education."

CONTEXT & BACKGROUND

The case was filed by private unaided educational institutions challenging the government's control over fees and admissions. However, the Supreme Court used the opportunity to address a larger question:

Is education a fundamental right under the Indian Constitution?



The judgment built upon *Mohini Jain v. State of Karnataka* (1992), where the Court had ruled that education is a part of the right to life.

CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES RAISED

- Does Article 21 (Right to Life) include the right to education?
- Can private institutions operate without state regulation, especially in essential sectors like education?
- What is the State's obligation under Directive Principles to provide education?

VERDICT & RATIO DECIDENDI

The Supreme Court held that:

- Right to education up to the age of 14 years is a Fundamental Right, derived from Article 21
- Beyond that age, it becomes a Directive Principle of State Policy
- The State is constitutionally obligated to provide free and compulsory education up to 14 years
- The Court also laid down a scheme for fee regulation and capitation fees to prevent profiteering by private institutions



- This decision marked the judicial recognition of education as a right, laying the foundation for future legislation.

DOCTRINE / PRINCIPLE EVOLVED

- Education is an enforceable component of Article 21, up to age 14
- The State must ensure universal elementary education
- Commercialisation of education is contrary to constitutional values



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IMPACT & LEGACY

- Laid the groundwork for the 86th Constitutional Amendment (2002), which inserted Article 21A, making free and compulsory education a Fundamental Right
- Influenced the enactment of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE Act)
- Introduced accountability and affordability norms in private education
- Reaffirmed the link between dignity, empowerment, and education



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RELEVANCE FOR UPSC

- GS Paper 2:
 - Education as a Fundamental Right
 - Role of judiciary in welfare governance
 - Implementation of RTE Act and 86th Amendment
- GS Paper 4 (Ethics):
 - Equity, justice, social empowerment through education
- Essay Paper:
 - Themes on Education as a Tool of Transformation, State and Social Justice, Fundamental Rights & Human Development
- UPSC Interview:
- Useful in questions on education reforms, constitutional rights, and inclusive policy

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