



# Equality in the Classroom: A Doctrinal Study on the Right to Education and the Tamil Nadu Uniform Syllabus Case

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**Abstract**--This doctrinal research article is written from the perspective of a 14-year-old student studying in the 9th Standard under the CBSE board in Tamil Nadu, India. The core focus of this study is the Fundamental Right to Education guaranteed under Article 21A of the Constitution of India, and how this right translates from paper to the actual classroom. Specifically, this research deeply analyzes the concept of equality in education by examining the landmark judgment of the Supreme Court of India in *State of Tamil Nadu v. K. Shyam Sunder* (2011). In Tamil Nadu, before 2010, the school education system was highly divided. There were four different boards: the State Board, Matriculation, Anglo-Indian, and Oriental boards. This created a huge gap between students. The rich went to Matriculation schools with advanced books, while the poor went to State Board schools. To bridge this gap, the government introduced the 'Samacheer Kalvi' (Uniform System of School Education). However, politics stepped in, and a new government tried to scrap it. The Supreme Court of India intervened and upheld the uniform syllabus, stating that the Right to Education is meaningless without equality in the quality of education. Through this article, I will explore the background of our education laws, the methodology of my research, the exact facts and arguments of this landmark case, and finally, my own analysis as a student. I will also provide suggestions and recommendations on how we can improve our school system. The purpose of this paper is to show that a syllabus is not just a bunch of pages; it is a tool for social justice.

**Keywords**-- Right to Education, Article 21A, Samacheer Kalvi, Supreme Court of India, Tamil Nadu, Uniform Education, Equality, Doctrine.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Hello, I am a 14-year-old student currently studying in the 9th standard in Tamil Nadu. Every day, when I pack my school bag, I look at my thick textbooks and wonder about the millions of other children in my state. Some of them go to schools with big playgrounds, air-conditioned classrooms, and very difficult, advanced books.

Some go to small government schools with fewer facilities and simpler books. Even though we are all children living in the same state, learning under the same sun, the education we receive is very different.

In my civics classes, my teacher taught me about the Constitution of India. I learned about our Fundamental Rights. The one that caught my attention the most was Article 21A. It says that the State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine. I fit right into this age bracket. This is my right. This is the right of my friends and every child I see walking on the street.

But this made me ask a big question: Does the "Right to Education" just mean getting a building and a blackboard? If one child gets a book that prepares them for big competitive exams, and another child gets a book that only teaches them basic reading, do they both really have the same "Right to Education"?

As a student, I wanted to research this. I am not a big lawyer or a judge, but I am the one actually sitting in the classroom. I experience the education system every day. Therefore, I decided to do a doctrinal legal study on this topic. I chose to focus on the branch of Constitutional Law and Education Law because it directly affects me and my peers.

To understand this, I looked at the history of my own state, Tamil Nadu. A few years ago, there was a massive legal and political fight over something called "Samacheer Kalvi" which translates to "Uniform Education". The government tried to combine all different types of school boards into one single syllabus so that the rich child and the poor child would read the exact same book. It became a huge court case that went all the way to the Supreme Court of India. The case is known as *State of Tamil Nadu v. K. Shyam Sunder* (2011). In this article, I will analyze this single landmark judgment. I will break it down so that any student can understand it. I will look at the facts, what the lawyers argued, and what the wise judges decided.

Finally, I will share my own thoughts and recommendations, because sometimes the best feedback comes from the students who wear the uniform every morning. When we think about education in India, we must remember our history. For a very long time, education was only for a few privileged people.



When India became independent, our leaders wanted everyone to go to school. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who wrote our Constitution, knew that education was the only way to uplift the poor and the marginalized.

As a 9th standard student, I find it fascinating how a few words written in a legal book can change the lives of millions of children. The journey of education in India has been slow but steady. First, it was just a "Directive Principle"—a suggestion to the government. Then, it became a "Fundamental Right"—a strict rule that the government must follow. But even after it became a rule, the quality of education remained unequal.

This research article is my attempt to connect the heavy legal words of the Supreme Court with the everyday reality of a classroom in Tamil Nadu. I hope that by reading this, other students, teachers, and even lawmakers can see the law from the eyes of a 14-year-old.

## II. METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

Because I am a school student, I cannot travel all over the country to conduct interviews or surveys. Therefore, I have used the "Doctrinal Research Methodology" for this article. What is doctrinal research? In simple terms, it means "library research." It is a study of legal documents, statutes, and case laws. I am looking at the "doctrine" or the law as it is written. I am reading the text of the Constitution, the specific Acts passed by the government, and the exact words spoken by the judges in their judgment. My method involves three simple steps:

- 2.1. Reading the Law: I read Article 21A of the Constitution and the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009.
- 2.2. Reading the Case: I studied the facts and the final decision of the Supreme Court in the State of Tamil Nadu v. K. Shyam Sunder (2011) case.
- 2.3. Analytical Thinking: I applied logic to understand why the Court decided the way it did, and I compared it to my own experiences as a student in Tamil Nadu.

This research is strictly analytical and qualitative. I have not used any outside internet articles, foreign cases, or random books. I have strictly kept my focus on the laws of India and the chosen judgment, as per the rules of my research assignment.

## III. PRIMARY AND SECONDARY DATA

In any research, we need data. For legal research, data does not always mean numbers or charts. It means the sources of our information.

### 3.1. Primary Data

Primary data refers to the original, first-hand sources of law. They are the actual laws passed by the Parliament and the judgments given by the courts. For this article, my primary data sources are strictly limited to:

The Constitution of India (Specifically Article 21A, Article 14 on Equality, and Article 45).

- 3.1.1. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE Act).
- 3.1.2. The Tamil Nadu Uniform System of School Education Act, 2010.
- 3.1.3. The Supreme Court Judgment: State of Tamil Nadu v. K. Shyam Sunder, (2011) 8 SCC 737.
- 3.1.4. The Madras High Court Judgment related to the same case.

### 3.2. Secondary Data

Secondary data refers to materials that explain, summarize, or talk about the primary data. Since I am a 14-year-old, my secondary data is very simple. I have used:

- 3.2.1. My Class 9 CBSE Civics and Political Science textbooks, which helped me understand the meaning of Fundamental Rights, equality, and the role of the Judiciary.
- 3.2.2. The basic understanding of the Tamil Nadu school system that I have gathered from growing up in this state and talking to my parents and teachers.

I have strictly avoided unverified sources, Wikipedia, or foreign laws. Everything in this article is grounded in Indian law.

## IV. BODY OF RESEARCH: THE JOURNEY OF EQUAL EDUCATION

### 4.1. The History of the Right to Education in India

To understand the case of Samacheer Kalvi, we first need to understand how education became a right in India. When the Constitution of India was adopted in 1950, education was not a Fundamental Right. It was placed in Part IV of the Constitution under the Directive Principles of State Policy (Article 45). Article 45 said that the State shall endeavor to provide free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years.

Because it was just a "Directive Principle," citizens could not go to the court and demand education. It was like a goal for the government, not a guarantee for the people. For many decades, millions of children in India did not go to school. They worked in fields, factories, and homes.



Then, over time, the Supreme Court of India realized that without education, all other rights are useless. How can you have the "Right to Life" (Article 21) if you cannot even read or write? How can you live with dignity? Finally, the Constitution was amended (86th Amendment Act, 2002), and a new article was added: Article 21A. Article 21A made education a Fundamental Right. Following this, the Parliament passed the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act in 2009 (The RTE Act). This law made it compulsory for the government to ensure that every child between 6 and 14 years gets an education.

But here is the problem that I, as a student, see. The law said every child must get an education. But it did not clearly say "what kind" of education. This loophole created a massive system of inequality, especially in my state of Tamil Nadu.

#### *4.2. The Tamil Nadu Context: A Divided Classroom*

In Tamil Nadu, the school system was very confusing before 2010. Imagine a street with four different schools, and the children in each school are reading completely different books, taking completely different exams, and learning completely different things. In Tamil Nadu, there were four main boards of education under the State Government:

4.2.1. The State Board: This was the most common board. Most government schools and many private schools followed this. The syllabus was often considered to be easier, but sometimes outdated.

4.2.2. The Matriculation Board: This was mostly for private English-medium schools. The syllabus was considered tougher, more advanced, and parents believed it prepared students better for engineering and medical college entrance exams.

4.3.3. The Anglo-Indian Board: A very small number of schools followed this, originally designed for the Anglo-Indian community with a strong focus on English.

4.4.4. The Oriental Board: Schools focusing on traditional languages and arts. As a 14-year-old, I can clearly see the problem here.

If a poor child goes to a free State Board government school, and a rich child pays high fees to go to a Matriculation school, they are not getting the same education. The Matriculation student had thicker books and learned advanced science and math earlier than the State Board student. When both these students finish 12th standard and write the same entrance exam for college, who will win? Obviously, the student who had the better syllabus. This means that our education system was creating inequality from Class 1.

The Right to Education was happening, but the Right to EQUAL Education was not.

To solve this massive problem, the Government of Tamil Nadu appointed a committee under Dr. Muthukumaran. The committee said that all these boards must be merged into one single syllabus. The government agreed and passed the "Tamil Nadu Uniform System of School Education Act, 2010". This system was beautifully named "Samacheer Kalvi" (Uniform Education).

#### *4.3. The Legal Drama: Changing Governments and Changing Books*

When the Samacheer Kalvi Act of 2010 was passed, textbooks were printed for millions of students. The plan was to start the uniform syllabus for Classes 1 and 6 immediately, and for the other classes the next year. However, in 2011, there were state elections in Tamil Nadu, and the government changed.

The new government did not like the Samacheer Kalvi books. They said the books printed by the previous government were of poor quality, had political messages praising the old government, and were totally useless. So, what did the new government do? They passed an amendment to the law. They basically paused the Samacheer Kalvi system indefinitely. They told the schools to go back to the old, divided system (State Board, Matriculation, etc.) and ordered that the millions of newly printed Samacheer Kalvi books should not be used. Imagine being a student at that time! It was the start of the academic year. You go to school to get your new books, but the government says, "Wait, we are cancelling these books." The students were confused, the teachers were confused, and parents were angry.

This action by the new government was challenged in the Madras High Court. People filed cases saying that the new government was playing politics with the future of children. The Madras High Court struck down the amendment and ordered the government to implement Samacheer Kalvi. The State Government, unhappy with the High Court, appealed to the highest court in the country—the Supreme Court of India. This leads us to the landmark judgment of my research: *State of Tamil Nadu v. K. Shyam Sunder* (2011).

### V. THE LANDMARK JUDGMENT: STATE OF TAMIL NADU V. K. SHYAM SUNDER (2011)

#### *5.1. The Core Issues Before the Supreme Court*

When the case reached the Supreme Court, the judges had to look at it very carefully. It was not just a fight between two political parties; it was a fight for the rights of 1.2 crore (12 million) students in Tamil Nadu.

From my understanding of the judgment, the Supreme Court had to decide on a few main questions:

5.1.1. Can a new government scrap a law made by the old government just because they do not like it?

5.1.2. Does the Right to Education (Article 21A) include the right to a "uniform" syllabus?

5.1.3. Does having different boards (Matriculation, State Board) violate Article 14 of the Constitution, which guarantees the Right to Equality?

5.1.4. Were the newly printed Samacheer Kalvi books really of bad quality, or was it just a political excuse?

These are very heavy questions. As a student, I feel that the second and third questions are the most important. If Article 14 says we are all equal, then why should my friend in a Matriculation school learn advanced physics while a student in a rural government school learns basic science? Does the Constitution allow educational discrimination?

#### 5.2. *The Arguments of the State Government (The Appellants)*

The lawyers representing the new Tamil Nadu government argued fiercely against Samacheer Kalvi. Their main points were:

5.2.1. *Bad Quality of Textbooks:* They argued that the syllabus created by the previous government was substandard. They said the books had grammar mistakes, poor content, and lacked depth.

5.2.2. *Political Propaganda:* They pointed out that some lessons and poems in the new books were written to praise the leaders of the previous ruling political party. They argued that children should not be forced to read political propaganda.

5.2.3. *Need for Time:* The government argued that they were not against uniform education forever. They just wanted to stop it for that specific year, appoint a new committee of experts, write better books, and then implement it.

5.2.4. *Legislative Power:* They argued that the state legislature has the absolute power to amend or repeal its own laws. Since they won the election, they had the right to change the policies.

When I read these arguments, I thought they had a point about the political propaganda. We children come to school to learn science, math, and history, not to read praises of politicians. However, cancelling the whole system just because a few pages were bad seemed like a huge overreaction to me.

#### 5.3. *The Arguments of the Respondents (Parents, Activists, and Students)*

On the other side were parents, education activists, and representatives of students. Their arguments were deeply connected to the Fundamental Rights:

5.3.1. *Equality in Education:* They argued strongly that the multiple-board system was creating a class divide. The rich were buying better education, and the poor were stuck with lower standards. Samacheer Kalvi was the only way to level the playing field.

5.3.2. *Wastage of Public Money:* They pointed out that the government had already spent Rs. 200 crores (a massive amount!) to print the new textbooks. Scrapping them would be a criminal waste of public money.

5.3.3. *The RTE Act:* They argued that the central RTE Act, 2009 requires the state to provide quality education. Uniformity is the first step towards quality.

5.3.4. *Political Malice:* They boldly stated that the new government was acting out of pure political revenge. They just wanted to erase the legacy of the old government, and they were using children as pawns in their political game.

As a 14-year-old, this argument makes the most sense to me. Why should students suffer because politicians are fighting? We just want our books and our classes to start on time!

#### 5.4. *The Supreme Court's Decision*

The Supreme Court of India, after listening to both sides, gave a historic judgment. The Court ruled in favor of the students and upheld the Samacheer Kalvi system. The judgment was a massive victory for equality. Here is what the Supreme Court declared, explained in simple terms:

5.4.1. *Right to Education includes Right to Quality and Equality:* The Court made a brilliant observation. They said that Article 21A (Right to Education) must be read along with Article 14 (Right to Equality). You cannot give inferior education to the poor and superior education to the rich and then claim you have followed the Constitution. The Court said that the state must provide education that is equal in quality for all. A uniform syllabus is a valid and necessary step to achieve this equality.

5.4.2. *Stopping Political Revenge:* The Supreme Court was very strict with the state government. The judges said that a change in government does not mean a change in the laws of the state, especially if the law was made for the benefit of the children. Statutory laws cannot be scrapped just because a rival political party came to power. The Court recognized that the amendment was brought with political malice.



5.4.3. *The Problem of Propaganda can be Fixed:* What about the bad quality and political propaganda in the books? The Supreme Court gave a very practical solution. Instead of throwing away millions of books and cancelling the whole system, the Court ordered the government to simply tear out or cover the specific pages that contained objectionable political material. They also asked the government to provide extra study materials to fix any gaps in the syllabus. Why throw the baby out with the bathwater?

5.4.4. *Upholding the High Court Order:* Ultimately, the Supreme Court completely agreed with the Madras High Court. They ordered the Tamil Nadu government to distribute the Samacheer Kalvi textbooks immediately and start the academic year without any further delay. This judgment is considered a landmark because it clearly established that "Uniform Education" is a part of constitutional equality. It told politicians to keep their hands off the school bags of children.

#### VI. ANALYSIS: A 14-YEAR-OLD'S PERSPECTIVE

Having read this judgment as part of my doctrinal research, I want to share my analysis as a student who actually studies in this system. When the Supreme Court said that everyone should have the same syllabus to achieve equality, legally, it was a masterpiece. It looks beautiful on paper. The idea that a child of a daily wage laborer and a child of a millionaire are carrying the exact same textbook to school gives a sense of deep social justice. It makes me feel proud of our Constitution.

However, from the classroom perspective, I have a few critical thoughts. Does reading the exact same book automatically make two students equal? Think about it. Student A goes to a school with digital smartboards, science laboratories with microscopes, a huge library, and teachers who are highly paid and motivated. Student B goes to a school where the roof leaks during the rain, there is no science lab, and one teacher has to manage three different classes at the same time. If you give both Student A and Student B the exact same Samacheer Kalvi textbook, are they receiving equal education? My answer is NO.

The Supreme Court solved the problem of "Syllabus Inequality". But they could not solve the problem of "Infrastructure Inequality" or "Teaching Inequality". In Tamil Nadu, after Samacheer Kalvi was introduced, the syllabus became equal. But because the overall standard of the books was lowered to accommodate everyone, many parents felt the education quality dropped. As a result, students who wanted advanced learning shifted away from the State Board and joined the CBSE board (the board I am studying in).

So, what happened? The rich and middle-class parents pulled their children out of the Samacheer Kalvi system and put them into Central Board schools (CBSE) or international schools. The state government schools were left mostly for the poor. Therefore, my doctrinal analysis is this: The Shyam Sunder judgment was legally flawless and morally right. It stopped politicians from ruining our academic year. But, "Uniform Syllabus" is only the first step. It is not the final destination of equality. True equality will only come when the schools themselves are of the same standard.

Furthermore, studying this case made me realize the immense power of the Judiciary in India. If the courts did not exist, the politicians would treat our education system like a toy. They would change our books every five years just to put their photos on the cover. The Supreme Court acted like a strict headmaster, scolding the politicians and protecting the students.

I also learned that laws are not just boring texts for adults. The RTE Act and Article 21A are living tools. However, there is a gap in the RTE Act. The Act ensures free education up to age 14 (Class 8). But what happens after that? In today's world, stopping education at Class 8 is like building half a bridge. You cannot cross the river. The law needs to evolve to make free and uniform education compulsory up to Class 12.

The Samacheer Kalvi case is a perfect example of how law, society, and education intersect. It shows that when the system fails, the citizens (in this case, parents and activists) can use the Constitution as a shield to protect the future of the youth.

#### VII. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on my research of the State of Tamil Nadu v. K. Shyam Sunder case and my own experience as a 9th standard student, I would like to offer the following suggestions to the lawmakers and the education department:

##### 7.1. *Focus on the Teacher, Not Just the Textbook*

A good teacher can teach advanced science using a simple book, but a bad teacher cannot teach anything even with the world's best book. The government must spend more money on training teachers, paying them well, and ensuring they are present in the classrooms. Uniform teaching quality is more important than uniform books.

##### 7.2. *Upgrade the Infrastructure*

Equality under Article 14 means equal facilities. The government should mandate a strict standard for school infrastructure.



Every school, whether private or government, must have a functioning library, a playground, clean toilets, and a science lab. If a school does not have these, the uniform syllabus is practically useless.

### *7.3. Keep Politics Out of Education*

We need a law that says school syllabi cannot be changed by the government directly. It should be handled by an independent committee of educators, scientists, and child psychologists. Politicians should have zero power over what is printed in our textbooks.

### *7.4. Extend the RTE Act*

As I mentioned in my analysis, Article 21A stops at age 14. This is not enough. The Right to Education must be extended up to the age of 18 (Class 12). The world is highly competitive, and basic elementary education is not sufficient to secure a good job or a dignified life.

### *7.5. Bridge Courses for Weaker Students*

When you make the syllabus uniform, some students will find it too hard, and some will find it too easy. Schools must be legally required to conduct "bridge courses" or extra classes to help students who are struggling to catch up with the uniform syllabus.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

Writing this doctrinal research article has been an eye-opening journey for me. As a 14-year-old student, I usually just study the subjects given to me. I rarely stop to think about the laws that decide what I study.

The case of State of Tamil Nadu v. K. Shyam Sunder (2011) is not just a bunch of legal documents; it is the story of how our Constitution protects the classroom.

It proved that in the eyes of the law, a child sitting in an air-conditioned room and a child sitting under a tin roof have the exact same right to learn. By striking down the political agenda of the state government, the Supreme Court of India protected the academic future of millions of children in Tamil Nadu.

The Samacheer Kalvi (Uniform Education) system was a bold experiment. While it did not solve all the problems of inequality in education, it was a massive and necessary first step. The Right to Education (Article 21A) is the most beautiful promise our country has made to its children. But a promise on paper must be matched by action on the ground.

We have achieved uniformity in textbooks, but our next battle must be achieving uniformity in school quality, teaching standards, and opportunities. I hope that one day, no child in India will have to worry about whether their school board is "good enough" to help them achieve their dreams. Education should be the great equalizer, not a source of division.

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