

Right to Freedom of Speech and Expression

In a petition filed by a student of Law, the Supreme Court of India laid down the importance of the Right to Freedom of Speech and Expression from both the point of view of individual liberty and the democratic structure of the country. The Court emphasized that freedom of speech and expression is of paramount importance under a democratic Constitution, as it allows citizens to express opinions, criticize policies, and participate meaningfully in governance. The Supreme Court observed that democracy thrives on free discussion and exchange of ideas, and therefore this freedom must be preserved to ensure changes in the composition of legislatures and governments through peaceful and informed means.

Why is it Important for Students in India?

The Fundamental Right to Freedom of Speech and Expression is especially important for students, as educational institutions are spaces for learning, questioning, debate, and intellectual growth. This right gained major attention in 2015 through the landmark case of *Shreya Singhal v. Union of India* (2015) 5 SCC 1, which originated from a petition filed in 2012. In this case, the Supreme Court struck down Section 66A of the Information Technology Act, 2000, holding it unconstitutional. Section 66A imposed unreasonable restrictions on online speech and had a chilling effect on the freedom of expression of citizens, including students. The judgment strengthened students' rights to express opinions on digital platforms, social media, and online academic spaces without fear of arbitrary punishment, as long as such expression is lawful and responsible.