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# Odisha Launches Gyanodaya: Free Education from KG to PG

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## WHY IN NEWS

*On July 1, 2026, the Odisha Cabinet approved “Gyanodaya, Shiksharu Samruddhi”, a five-year scheme that makes Odisha the first Indian state to offer universal free education from kindergarten (KG) to postgraduate (PG) level in government and government-aided institutions.*

The scheme completes a continuum of public-funded schooling and higher education in the state and positions education access as a distinct social-welfare priority. For UPSC aspirants, it is a live case study in cooperative and fiscal federalism (<https://ujjyari.com/terms/fiscal-federalism/>), education equity, and the operationalisation of the Right to Education promise beyond the constitutionally mandated age band.

## WHAT THE SCHEME PROVIDES

“Gyanodaya, Shiksharu Samruddhi” carries an outlay of about Rs 5,467.55 crore over five years, with a first-year outlay of roughly Rs 895.57 crore. It delivers a complete admission-fee waiver from the 2026-27 session and is expected to benefit roughly 32 lakh students a year.

The coverage spans the full school-to-university ladder in the public system:

LEVEL	COVERAGE
School (Classes 9 to 12)	Government and government-aided schools
Undergraduate (regular)	State public universities, government and aided colleges
Postgraduate (regular)	State public universities, government and aided colleges
Admission fee	Complete waiver from the 2026-27 session

Importantly, the scheme is bounded. It excludes self-financing courses, private-unaided institutions, PPP-mode (public-private partnership) institutions, and professional or technical courses. This keeps the fiscal exposure predictable and directs the subsidy toward general education in the public system, where the bulk of first-generation and economically weaker learners study.

## Why “First in the Country” Matters

Several states run free schooling or fee-reimbursement programmes, and higher-education scholarships are common. What sets Odisha’s model apart is the universal KG-to-PG continuity in one integrated scheme: a child entering kindergarten in a government institution can, in principle, complete a master’s degree without paying admission fees at any stage. Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi described Odisha as the first state to introduce such a universal free-education scheme.

## CONSTITUTIONAL AND POLICY BACKDROP

The scheme sits on top of an existing rights architecture and extends it upward:

- **Article 21A** of the Constitution makes free and compulsory education a fundamental right for children aged 6 to 14 years. It was inserted by the 86th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2002.
- The **Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009** operationalises Article 21A for the 6 to 14 age group.
- Gyanodaya extends the free-access principle below age 6 (KG) and above age 14 (up to PG), which the Constitution and RTE Act do not mandate (<https://ujivari.com/vocab/mandate/>). This is a policy choice, not a legal obligation.

Globally, the scheme advances **Sustainable Development** (<https://ujivari.com/terms/sustainable-development/>) **Goal 4 (SDG 4): Quality Education**, particularly the targets on inclusive and equitable (<https://ujivari.com/vocab/equitable/>) education and affordable tertiary access.

## ANALYSIS AND WAY FORWARD

The core tension is between equity and fiscal sustainability. On the equity side, a universal admission-fee waiver removes a real barrier for first-generation learners, girls, and students from Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and Other Backward Class households, who are over-represented in Odisha’s public institutions. Because the benefit is universal rather than means-tested, it also avoids the exclusion errors that plague targeted schemes.

On the sustainability side, a recurring commitment of the order of Rs 895 crore in year one, rising with enrolment, must be protected across budget cycles and political transitions. The design choices, keeping out self-financing and technical courses, limit runaway costs, but the state will need to pair fee-waivers with investment in teaching quality, laboratories and learning outcomes, otherwise access improves while quality

stagnates. The way forward lies in outcome tracking (learning levels, completion and transition rates), a transparent reimbursement mechanism for aided institutions, and periodic third-party evaluation to justify continued outlay.

## UPSC RELEVANCE

**GS Paper 2:** Government policies and interventions for development in the education sector; issues relating to the development and management of the social sector; welfare schemes and mechanisms for the protection of vulnerable sections; federalism (<https://ujjyari.com/terms/federalism/>) and the role of states in social policy.

### Prelims pointers:

- Article 21A inserted by the 86th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2002; RTE Act enacted in 2009.
- Article 21A covers ages 6 to 14; Gyanodaya extends free access from KG to PG.
- SDG 4 concerns quality education.
- Scheme outlay: about Rs 5,467.55 crore over five years; first-year outlay about Rs 895.57 crore; roughly 32 lakh beneficiaries a year.

**Mains question:** “Universal free education schemes can advance equity but strain state finances.” Critically examine this trade-off with reference to a recent state initiative extending free education beyond the constitutionally mandated age band. (15 marks, 250 words)

## FACTS CORNER

### ★ FACTS CORNER, KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

Scheme name: Gyanodaya, Shiksharu Samruddhi, approved by the Odisha Cabinet on July 1, 2026.

Outlay: About Rs 5,467.55 crore over five years; first-year outlay about Rs 895.57 crore.

Coverage: Free education (admission-fee waiver) from KG to PG in government and government-aided institutions, effective from the 2026-27 session; includes Classes 9 to 12 and regular UG and PG courses.

Beneficiaries: Roughly 32 lakh students a year.

Exclusions: Self-financing, private-unaided, PPP-mode, and professional or technical courses.

First in India: Odisha is the first state to offer a universal KG-to-PG free-education scheme.

Constitutional link: Article 21A (Right to Education, ages 6 to 14), RTE Act 2009; scheme extends access below and above this band.

Global link: Advances SDG 4 (Quality Education).

Sources: *Business Standard* (<https://www.business-standard.com/>), *Organiser* (<https://organiser.org/>), *Odisha*

*Government* (<https://odisha.gov.in/>)  
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