



Ceremonial Bench
to mark the completion of
SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS
of the establishment of the
Supreme Court of India





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Tuesday, 28 January 2025

Chief Justice's Court, Main Building,
Supreme Court of India, New Delhi

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**Hon'ble the Chief Justice of India and
Hon'ble Judges of the Supreme Court of India**
at the Special sitting of the Ceremonial Bench on 28 January 2025

Hon'ble Shri Sanjiv Khanna, Chief Justice of India

Hon'ble Mr. Justice B.R. Gavai

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Surya Kant

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Hrishikesh Roy

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Abhay S. Oka

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Vikram Nath

Hon'ble Mr. Justice J.K. Maheshwari

Hon'ble Mrs. Justice B.V. Nagarathna

Hon'ble Mr. Justice M.M. Sundresh

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Pamidighantam Sri Narasimha

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Sudhanshu Dhulia

Hon'ble Mr. Justice J.B. Pardiwala

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Dipankar Datta

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Pankaj Mithal

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Sanjay Karol

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Sanjay Kumar

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Ahsanuddin Amanullah

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Manoj Misra

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Rajesh Bindal

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Aravind Kumar

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Prashant Kumar Mishra

Hon'ble Mr. Justice K.V. Viswanathan

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Ujjal Bhuyan

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Sarasa Venkatanarayana Bhatti

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Satish Chandra Sharma

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Augustine George Masih

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Sandeep Mehta

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Prasanna Bhalachandra Varale

Hon'ble Mr. Justice N. Kotiswar Singh

Hon'ble Mr. Justice R. Mahadevan

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Manmohan

Hon'ble Mr. Justice K. Vinod Chandran

Supreme Court of India

SUPREME COURT OF INDIA

SITTING PLAN (75 YEARS OF ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SUPREME COURT OF INDIA)

SITTING PLAN FOR THE CEREMONIAL BENCH ON TUESDAY, THE 28TH JANUARY 2025 AT 3.30 P.M. IN THE HON'BLE CHIEF JUSTICE'S COURT

- K. Vinod Chandran, J.
- R. Mahadevan, J.
- Prasanna B Varale, J.
- Augustine George Masih, J.
- S.V.N. Bhatti, J.
- K.V. Viswanathan, J.
- Aravind Kumar, J.
- Manoj Misra, J.
- Sanjay Kumar, J.
- Pankaj Mithal, J.
- J.B. Parthiwal, J.
- P.S. Narasimha, J.
- B.V. Nagarathna, J.
- Vikram Nath, J.
- Hrishikesh Roy, J.
- B.R. Gavai, J.
- C.JI
- Manmohan, J.
- N. Katiswar Singh, J.
- Sandeep Mehta, J.
- Satish Chandra Sharma, J.
- Ujjal Bhuyan, J.
- Prashant Kumar Mishra, J.
- Rajesh Bindal, J.
- Ahsanuddin Amanullath, J.
- Sanjay Karol, J.
- Dipankar Datta, J.
- Sudhanshu Dhulia, J.
- M.M. Sundresh, J.
- J.K. Maheshwari, J.
- A.S. Oka, J.
- Surya Kant, J.

(LOBBY)

Sanjay Kumar, J.	K. Vinod Chandran, J.
Pankaj Mithal, J.	R. Mahadevan, J.
J.B. Parthiwal, J.	Prasanna B Varale, J.
P.S. Narasimha, J.	Augustine George Masih, J.
B.V. Nagarathna, J.	S.V.N. Bhatti, J.
Vikram Nath, J.	K.V. Viswanathan, J.
Hrishikesh Roy, J.	Aravind Kumar, J.
B.R. Gavai, J.	Manoj Misra, J.
C.JI	Sanjay Kumar, J.
	Pankaj Mithal, J.
	J.B. Parthiwal, J.
	P.S. Narasimha, J.
	B.V. Nagarathna, J.
	Vikram Nath, J.
	Hrishikesh Roy, J.
	B.R. Gavai, J.
	C.JI
	Manoj Misra, J.
	Aravind Kumar, J.
	Hrishikesh Roy, J.
	B.R. Gavai, J.
	C.JI
	Surya Kant, J.
	Rajesh Bindal, J.
	A.S. Oka, J.
	Prashant Kumar Mishra, J.
	Ujjal Bhuyan, J.
	M.M. Sundresh, J.
	Sudhanshu Dhulia, J.
	Dipankar Datta, J.
	Sanjay Karol, J.
	Ahsanuddin Amanullath, J.
	Rajesh Bindal, J.
	Prashant Kumar Mishra, J.
	Ujjal Bhuyan, J.
	Satish Chandra Sharma, J.
	Sandeep Mehta, J.
	N. Katiswar Singh, J.
	Manmohan, J.
	Ahsanuddin Amanullath, J.

WELL OF THE COURT

Registry Officers

who regulated the proceedings of the
special sitting of the Ceremonial Bench

Mr. Atul M. Kurhekar,
Secretary General

Mr. Bharat Parashar,
OSD (Secretary General)

Mr. Mahesh Tanajirao Patankar,
Registrar (Admn. Gen.)

Mr. S.K. Kamesh Nookala,
Additional Registrar-cum-PPS to Hon'ble the Chief Justice of India

Appearance from the Bar

in the Ceremonial Bench of Supreme Court
held on 28 January 2025

Mr. R. Venkataramani
Learned Attorney General for India

Mr. Tushar Mehta
Learned Solicitor General of India

Mr. Kapil Sibal (Sr.)
President, SCBA

Ms. Rachana Srivastava (Sr.)
Vice President, SCBA

Mr. Vikrant Yadav
Hony. Secretary, SCBA

Dr. Sandeep Singh
Joint Secretary, SCBA

Ms. Sasmita Tripathy
Treasurer, SCBA

Mr. Susheel Kumar Tomar
Joint Treasurer, SCBA

Mr. Vipin Nair
President, SCAORA

Mr. Amit Sharma
Vice President, SCAORA

Mr. Nikhil Jain
Hony. Secretary, SCAORA

Mr. Kaustubh Shukla
Joint Secretary, SCAORA

Mr. Vishal Prasad
Joint Treasurer, SCAORA

Mr. Arijit Prasad (Sr.)

Mr. P.H. Parekh (Sr.)

Mr. Jayant Bhushan (Sr.)

Mr. Anand Sanjay M. Nuli (Sr.)

Ms. Sonia Mathur (Sr.)

Ms. Shobha Gupta (Sr.)

Mr. Vikas Bansal

Ms. Nandani Gupta

Mr. Mukesh Kumar Singh

Mr. Ashish Kumar Sinha

Mr. Shashank Shekhar

Mr. Anil C. Nishani

Ms. Yogamaya M.G.

Ms. Jyoti Parasher

Ms. Rachna Gandhi

Ms. Reena Pandey

Dr. Meenakshi Kalra

Ms. Astha Sharma

Mr. Aditya Giri

Mr. A. Selvin Raja

75th Anniversary
Ceremonial Speech

Celebrating 75 Years of Coming into Effect of Our Constitution

Shri R. Venkataramani
Attorney General for India

Standing in the precincts of the “*sentinel on the qui vive*”, the Supreme Court of India on a solemn occasion like this is a matter of great privilege and as etching an important milestone in our constitutional history. The 75th year of Constitutional adoption beyond any question is a matter of both celebration, buoyancy and an occasion for planning and laying our road maps for the future. 75 years of constitutional rule without serious breakdowns is no mean achievement. We must indeed celebrate the resilience of the constitution and its endurance made so by all the participants of our democracy. We must celebrate its endurance by plunging into the history of our constitution making, the sacrifices made by millions of people laying the foundations for freedom and liberty not less than Magna Carta, and the remarkable contributions made and insights bestowed by the makers of the constitution. We must celebrate its endurance without mutilations as part of our democratic journey as special, distinct and worthy of emulation. We must celebrate its endurance equally as part of the faith and commitment which we the people of India have placed in rule of law as informed by the constitution. We must celebrate its vibrancy reflected in elections after elections and all the safeguards thoughtfully provided by courts on every needed occasion. We must celebrate the jurisprudential contributions of deep reflections and visions of the Supreme Court and the High Courts in the high promotion of its transformative potential

and in conveying to the nation, the Parliament and the institutions of governance values of inclusiveness, and diversity as part of our equality journey. This Stately building is home to visionary constitutional doctrines and thoughts which have sustained our democratic fabric.

The lawmaking experiments and parliamentary engagements in deftly handling complex questions of social management without rocking the basic structure though making some scratches are matters of celebration too. Permanence and endurance are sustained by flexibility long ago stated by Thomas Jefferson in 1824, when he wrote “the real friends of the Constitution in its federal form, if they wish it to be immortal, should be attentive, by amendments, to make it keep pace with the advance of the age in science and experience”. Dr. Ambedkar had this and other experiences from history in mind when he said in his concluding remarks in the Constituent Assembly in 1949 *“the first thing in my judgment we must do is to hold fast to constitutional methods of achieving our social and economic objectives.”* He also talked about drift with mastery. We have by now chiseled into our constitutional practice what we can do and what we shall not do. How we are able to do so in the midst of globalization challenges is demonstrated by our recent engagements in striking several balances in the economic domain, policy and international relationships.

All this is because of our unflinching commitment to the constitution and its demands on our intelligence and the non-negotiable roots of building a fair and just society. Our national fiber made of thousands of years of incomparable togetherness born of deep spiritual and cultural values and our constitutional fabric have now seamlessly merged that no force or attempt can undo. That we are yet to satisfy the needs and concerns of large numbers of our peoples in want and fulfillment is all the more reasons for continuing on the paths laid. All this celebration we must do as we note how fissures and fractures have perilously exposed several nations to constitutional and democratic breakdowns. We must do so also to set at rest shallow cynicism about *Indian* state and bring to command all our genius in our march towards a fair social order.

An American law academic writing about the timeless lessons for the issues of our era though from the U S lens, says “constitutional law is a practice, like surgery or chess.” We can indeed write on how our constitutional journey has been more of chess than deep surgery. Talking of the engagement Eastern Europe of the last decade of 20th century in many different revolutions armed, economic, cultural, political, and social it is said that none of these are more dramatic and perhaps none so successful as its constitutional reforms. The voices of our worthy members of the constituent assembly seem to resonate today with all these ideas. The legal fraternity of India being a proud partner in this remarkable journey will continue to play its role in more and more nobler ways and chronicle our genius to the rest of the world.

The Supreme Court of India at 75

Shri Kapil Sibal

Senior Advocate, President, SCBA

Hon'ble Chief Justice of India Shri Sanjiv Khanna; Hon'ble Judges of the Supreme Court of India; Attorney General for India Shri R. Venkataramani; Solicitor General of India Shri Tushar Mehta, Additional Solicitors General of India; Vice President of the Supreme Court Bar Association Ms. Rachana Srivastava; Secretary of the Supreme Court Bar Association Mr. Vikrant Yadav, Members of the Executive Committee of the Supreme Court Bar Association; President of the Supreme Court Advocates-on-Record Association Shri Vipin Nair; Vice-President, Secretary and Office Bearers of the Supreme Court Advocates-on-Record Association; Senior Advocates of the Supreme Court of India present here, Advocates-on-Record present here, Ladies and Gentlemen.

As we gather here today to reflect on 75 years of this great institution, I want to begin by paying homage to those who brought us freedom. We pay tribute to the sacrifices made by millions who resolved to fight the might of the Empire with the weapon of non-violence. Used for the first time in any freedom struggle, this weapon signified a moral authority more powerful than the threats, violence, and criminal dehumanising acts our people were subjected to. It is this hard won independence and this defiant allegiance to democracy that this Court has been tasked with protecting, bringing dignity, autonomy and mutual respect to the everyday lives of ordinary people.

Right since its inception, our Court has had no hesitation in deciding cases as per the law without undue favour to the all-powerful state and with no regard to the political popularity of the policies in question. It was this independence that had the Court questioning, by 1964, whether the government

had unlimited powers to amend the Constitution to take away fundamental rights in *Sajjan Singh's* case reported at *AIR 1965 SC 845*. In 1967, to protect individual liberties, the Court held that the government had no power to amend fundamental rights in the landmark judgement in *Golak Nath v. State of Punjab, (1967) SCC OnLine SC 14*, refusing to accept the argument that if the government was stopped from amending fundamental rights, there would be chaos. Finally, the impasse ended when the Supreme Court propounded the famous basic structure theory that disallowed amendments to the basic features of the Constitution in *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala, (1973) 4 SCC 225*.

Faced with blowback in the form of judicial supersession and unprecedented transfers impacting the independence of the judiciary and, in time, judicial review, the court in *SP Gupta's* case reported at *AIR 1982 SC 149*, and later in the *Supreme Court Advocates on Record (1993) 4 SCC 441* case evolved the collegium system to protect the judiciary from the executive. In *SR Bommai (1994) 3 SCC 1*, the Court came down heavily on the abuse of Article 356 to dismiss state governments for political reasons. In *DC Wadhwa (1987) 1 SCC 378* and *Krishna Kumar Singh (2017) SCC 1*, the Court struck down repeated ordinances to bypass lawmaking to be a fraud on the Constitution. In essence, the Court has been responsive to the needs of the political environment and has sought to best preserve the constitutional vision of our founders despite the continual stresses and strains in our chaotic democracy.

An area where the Court has left an indelible mark is in the area of fundamental rights and civil liberties. The difference between *AK Gopalan (1950) SCC 228* on one hand and *RC Cooper AIR (1970) SC 564* and *Maneka Gandhi AIR (1978) SC 597* on the other, or between *MP Sharma* and *KS Puttaswamy (2019) 1 SCC 1*, *Sowmithry Vishnu (1985) SCC (CRI) 325* to *Joseph Shine (2019) 3 SCC 39*, *Suresh Kumar Kaushal AIR 2014 SC 563* to *Navtej Johar (2019) 1 SCC (Cri) 1*, *Champakam Dorairajan to Indra Sawhney AIR 1993 SC 477*, or *Anwar Ali Sarkar AIR 1952 SC 75* to *EP Royappa (1974) 4 SCC 3* is one

borne of a deeper understanding of fundamental rights, what they mean, how they relate to each other and how they empower citizens. In this journey the court has relaxed the requirements for legal standing to enable public interest litigation by public spirited persons to bring to light injustices suffered by the powerless or deal with large scale problems like bonded labour (*Bandhua Mukta Morcha AIR 1984 SCC 802*) or the environment (*MC Mehta's cases*).

The SC has developed an enviable jurisprudence on fairness in administrative action- using doctrines such as promissory estoppel (*Motilal Padampat AIR 1979 SC 621*), proportionality (*Modern Dental*), manifest arbitrariness (*Shayara Bano AIR 2017 SC 4609*), and the principles of natural justice (*Indo Afghan Agencies AIR 1968 SC 718, Erusian Equipment 1975 AIR SC 266*).

Its curative petitions have opened a jurisdiction to correct errors quite unknown in the rest of the world. In civil, commercial, consumer and criminal matters, the court has delivered several decision of exceptional clarity, resolving issues seamlessly to allow everyday justice to move along.

In these 75 years we have seen many great judges and chief justices - Justice Mukherjea, Justice Vivian Bose, J. Subba Rao, Justice Hidayatullah, Justice Krishna Iyer, Justice Venkatachaliah and many others. There can be no better example of judicial independence and courage than J. HR Khanna. They have been trailblazers and a model to follow.

This is not to say that the court has not on occasion erred. The infamous *ADM Jabalpur (1976) 2 SCC 521* judgement, where this Court did not heed the wisdom of the High Courts and ended all constitutional means to combat the Emergency, is an indelible stain. There are cases where the Court should have intervened and did not or where it has intervened in matters where it lacks both institutional competence and legitimacy.

The question remains to be asked- does the court retain the elements of what has made it so great in the past- will the court continue to be an

indispensable institution in our democracy? I am confident that it will if it avoids certain pitfalls.

First, the Court must find a way to solve its enormous backlog. Judicial delays are a serious concern, not only because of the time it takes for a case to reach resolution but because litigants and lawyers have found a way to weaponize judicial delays to favour one side over the other. The Court in effect decides by not deciding- a unique phenomenon.

Second, the Court strength lies in the principle of open justice- where the most persuasive argument ought to prevail, and the power of argument must prevail over the argument of power. This means that the judiciary must eschew excessive secrecy and embrace a more open way of being.

Third, the Court must find a way to ensure that polyvocality- i.e. 15 different court rooms - do not become 15 independent courts. Stare decisis, and judicial consistency are the embodiment of the rule of law.

Fourth, the Court must not forget that the primary quality of predecessor judges who are remembered is their courage- courage to defy conventional wisdom, to follow the untrodden path, to do the right thing. Courage is contagious, but so is cowardice. Our Constitution and its own proud history both demand that the Court always stand up for our values, our freedoms and are hallowed democracy.

Our Constitution is at once accessible and sublime. Its message is loud and clear in the heart of all patriots. When we look at the history of independent India as outsiders or historians, we note that when faced with difficult odds, the Constitution has found its unassuming champions, not in the least among the bar and on the bench of this august Court. This Bible of ours instils in us the values that we need to cherish—the values of sovereignty, of protecting the security of the state, of ensuring that our freedoms are not trampled upon, as this republic, through its democratic processes, seeks to realise the aspirations of

ordinary folk at the bottom of the ladder. While the Republic has done yeomen service to us in the past, we need to remain vigilant. This Court must be the champion of our Constitution and bring to life the values of constitutional morality hidden within the cold print of the Articles of the Constitution. These are interpreted by our great judges, who truly understood, when confronted with challenges, the meaning of the constitutional values that permeate each Article of the Constitution. These values need to be preserved, and we, the members of the bar and the judges, owe our allegiance to the rule of law, the upholding of which is our solemn responsibility.

Address by
Hon'ble Shri Sanjiv Khanna
Chief Justice of India

My Esteemed Brother and Sister Judges,

Shri R Venkataramani

Ld. Attorney General for India

Shri Tushar Mehta

Ld. Solicitor General of India

Shri Kapil Sibal

President, Supreme Court Bar Association

Shri Vipin Nair

President, Supreme Court Advocates-on-Record Association

Members of the Bar and Registry Officials,

As we gather today to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the first sitting of the Supreme Court of India, we stand – as on each historic occasion – at an intersection. An intersection that connects the history, the present, and the future. What began in 1950 as a successor to the Federal Court, has evolved into perhaps the world's most vibrant and dynamic apex court, one that truly embodies the aspirations and diversity of 1.4 billion Indians.

What sets our Supreme Court apart on the global stage is its unique character as a true people's court. The Court remains accessible to the common public, and in its diversity of the Judges in these courtrooms, the multitude of voices find representation at the highest level of our judiciary.

Each decade of our Court's jurisprudence serves as a mirror to our nation's challenges. Like rings in a mature tree that reflect its journey through different seasons, these judgments reflect not just legal evolution, but our country's very pulse. What emerges is not an unmoving structure carved from sandstone, but rather a living, breathing institution. It has been responsive to the conscience of our democracy, adapting and evolving to embrace the complexities of each era while remaining rooted in the bedrock of constitutional values.

The First Decade – 1950s – The Sunrise Years

In 1950, when we adopted the Constitution, the three wings of government were assigned distinct responsibilities. The monumental task was to transform a newly independent nation into embodying the values, the ethos and the morality of our Constitution. In Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's words:

“Constitutional morality has to be embodied in nation building, it has to be cultured in a nation like India where everything is newborn.”

To achieve this ideal, the Constitution bequeathed to the Supreme Court of India¹ a wide and expansive jurisdiction. At its inaugural sitting, India's first Chief Justice of India, Hiralal J. Kania, said that “the Supreme Court will declare and interpret the law of the land” but not in a “spirit of formal and barren legalism”.

1 Hereinafter, the “Court”.

One of the Court's earliest decisions was *Romesh Thapar v. State of Madras*,² pronounced on the 26th May, 1950. The freedom of speech and expression guaranteed by Article 19 of the Constitution, it elucidates, is a right that could be restricted only under Article 19(2), which provide for certain reasonable restrictions. This Court observed in *Daryao v State of Uttar Pradesh*³:

“Liberty of the individual and the protection of his fundamental rights are the very essence of the democratic way of life adopted by the Constitution, and it is the privilege and the duty of this Court to uphold those rights. This Court would naturally refuse to circumscribe them or to curtail them except as provided by the Constitution itself.”

The Second Decade – 1960s – Years of Anchorage as well as Discovery

In 1960, the sanctioned strength of the Court was expanded to 14. The most significant judicial event in the 1960s turned on the interpretation of a single word – ‘law’ – in Article 13 of the Constitution of India. Article 13 provides that laws inconsistent with or in derogation of fundamental rights are, to that extent of inconsistency, void. Courts were tasked to interpret whether the expression “law” used in Article 13 included constitutional amendments. If it did, then whether the chapter on fundamental rights would be rendered immune from amendment.

The discussion continued till the seventies, until settled in *Kesavananda Bharti*,⁴ where the majority of the thirteen Judges Bench held that Parliament can amend any provision of the Constitution, however, such amendment powers cannot be exercised to abrogate or destroy the basic or fundamental features of the Constitution.

2 1950 SCC 435 : AIR 1950 SC 124.

3 AIR 1961 SC 1457.

4 AIR 1973 SC 1461.

1970s and 1980s – Years of turbulence leading the way to social justice and equality jurisprudence

Acceptance of Public Interest Litigation diluted the principle of *locus standi* to actualise the right of access to justice for all citizens – importantly the most marginalized. Justice Krishna Iyer in ***Mumbai Kamgar Sabha, Bombay***⁵ reasoned that legal technicalities should not become “an added terror” for the underprivileged. Acknowledging India’s unique socio-economic constraints, this Court in ***S.P. Gupta v. Union of India***⁶, emphasized that it was necessary to democratize judicial remedies.

In ***Hussainara Khatoon***,⁷ this Court dealt with the rights of undertrial prisoners highlighting the right to speedy trial and resulting in the release of more than 40,000 undertrial prisoners. Critical issues of juveniles in other prisoners were dealt with by this Court in ***Kadra Pahadiya v. State of Bihar***.⁸

In ***Sunil Batra***⁹ the Court highlighted prisoners’ rights and systematic issues in the administration of justice. In ***D.K. Basu v State of West Bengal***,¹⁰ this Court observed that custodial violence strikes a blow at the rule of law. It issued several directions to be followed in all cases of arrest or detention till suitable provisions were incorporated in the Cr.P.C.

In ***Joginder Kumar v State of UP***,¹¹ this Court emphasized that a police officer may have the power to arrest but an arrest should be made only after a reasonable satisfaction was reached as to the genuineness of the complaint; to the person’s involvement; and the need to arrest.

5 1976 SCR (3) 591.

6 AIR 1982 SC 149.

7 1980 1 SCC 98.

8 1983 2 SCC 104.

9 AIR 1978 SC 1675.

10 1997 (1) SCC 416.

11 (1994) 4 SCC 260.

In *Mithu v. State of Punjab*,¹² the mandatory death sentence under Section 303 of the IPC, was struck down as unconstitutional.

In *Indira Gandhi v. Raj Narain*,¹³ the Court established judicial review and free and fair elections were fundamental part of the Constitution beyond the reach of the amending power of the legislature.

In *Bandhua Mukti Morcha v Union of India*,¹⁴ bonded labour was categorized as incompatible with Article 21 which includes protection of health of workers, women and men, against abuse.

In the initial years, this Court had interpreted all fundamental rights as rights working in exclusive silos. This judicial attitude, however, underwent a significant change after the Emergency was imposed in 1975.

In *Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India*,¹⁵ this Court ruled that “the attempt of the Court should be to expand the reach and ambit of the Fundamental Rights.” Articles 14, 19 and 21 were not mutually exclusive and had to be read together and so the procedure affecting any of the rights had to be ‘just, fair and reasonable’ and not ‘arbitrary, fanciful or oppressive’.

1990s: Era of Consolidation and Expansion of Fundamental Rights

The 1990s ushered in an era where the Supreme Court not only remained vigilant in protecting individual rights but also stepped in to address legislative and executive gaps.

The Court adopted an expansive interpretation of fundamental rights, reading them harmoniously with the directive principles for state policy. In

12 AIR 1983 SC 473

13 AIR 1975 SC 2299.

14 (1984) 3 SCC 161.

15 AIR 1978 SC 597.

Unni Krishnan v. State of Andhra Pradesh,¹⁶ this Court held that the right to education naturally flowed from the right to life recognized under Article 21 of the Constitution. This led to the insertion of Article 21A in the Indian Constitution and the enactment of Right to Education Act in 2009.

This Court has also been a vanguard for protection and preservation of the environment. In its judgments, the Court has articulated the concepts of Sustainable Development and the Polluter Pays principle. It has also applied the public trust doctrine in several cases, highlighting that the public has a right to enjoy common resources, with the State being entrusted to guard and maintain these resources.

In *Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan*¹⁷ this Court laid down a set of comprehensive guidelines to prevent sexual harassment at work. The guidelines laid down in *Vishaka* eventually led to the enactment of a legislation, after considerable time, in 2013.

In *Indra Sawhney v. Union of India*,¹⁸ a 9-judge bench of the Supreme Court held that affirmative action is not an exception, but a tool for guaranteeing equality of opportunity.

While the Constitution creates a strong centre, it also advocates a balanced federal structure. It is one of the basic features of our Constitution which cannot be abrogated by a constitutional amendment. This was the crux of what 9-Judges of this Court held in *S.R. Bommai v. Union of India*.¹⁹

S.R. Bommai also has implications for the secular fabric of India. The Court, *inter alia*, held that secularism is a basic feature of the Constitution.

16 (1993) 1 SCC 645.

17 (1997) 6 SCC 241.

18 (1992) 3 SCC (supp) 217.

19 (1994) 3 SCC 1.

2000s till today

The two decades of the twenty-first century stand as a testament to the Supreme Court's evolving role in our constitutional framework. No other Apex Court worldwide navigates such an expansive domain – from personal liberty to environmental issues, from Intellectual Property Rights to privacy to the Right to Information.

The evolution began with strengthening electoral democracy by establishing voters' right to information about candidates as an extension to freedom of expression, which includes the right to impart and receive information.

The Court dismantled gender stereotypes in employment, rejecting outdated restrictions on women's workplace participation.

Digital rights emerged as a new frontier of constitutional protection. The Court struck down vague restrictions on online speech, extending constitutional safeguards to digital spaces.

In socioeconomic justice, it broadened affirmative action to include economic criteria, recognizing diverse forms of disadvantage in modern society.

Apart from public law, this Court's decisions have strengthened India's economic landscape by injecting clarity, efficiency and fairness - be it the Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code or the Arbitration & Conciliation Act. This Court has also strived to strengthen Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanisms.

The public understanding of justice has evolved from a pure legal construct to a living force that touches lives across the nation.

While the Court's journey reflects remarkable evolution in rights and reach, three challenges demand our attention. First, the weight of arrears which continues to delay justice. Second, mounting costs of litigation threatens true accessibility. Third, and perhaps most fundamentally – justice cannot thrive

where and when falsehood is practised. These challenges mark the next frontier in our pursuit for justice.

75 years after our constitutional journey began, the Supreme Court stands transformed, yet anchored in its foundational mission. This transformation reflects a deeper recognition – that justice must be both principled and practical. In doing so, it makes the constitutional promise of justice – social, economic, and political – a living reality for millions of Indians. Over the seven and a half decades, this Court has transformed the constitutional promise into a reality through its judgments.

Jai Hind!



SUPREME COURT OF INDIA

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