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Landmark Supreme Court Judgments in India

(Manasvi Katiyar)

"The story of India's democracy is written not only in Parliament, but also written in the judgments of the Supreme Court." Behind every judgment there is a story. Whenever we read about a case, the questions that come to our mind are- what happened? Why did it become important? Why is it still relevant? Why there is need for the judicial intervention? This is where the role of Supreme Court has become important and so is the Judgments. So to answer all your questions, here are some of the most important landmark judgment of Indian history which everyone must know:

1. Kesavananda Bharati Sripadagalvaru & Ors. V. State of Kerala & Anr. (1973):

This case is marked as one of the most important historic landmark decision of the Supreme Court of India in which the court held that "Parliament can amend the Constitution but it cannot change the basic structure of the Constitution". This is the longest ever heard case in history of India. It was for the first time that the larger bench of 13 judges was constituted to hear the case which in itself reflects the constitutional importance.

Even in law colleges, the very first case which we were taught or asked to refer is Kesavananda Bharati case. Many interpretations were also given to this case. The principle popularly known as the Basic Structure Doctrine came from this judgment. Even decades later, government change, policies change but the constitutional values remain same and there is no doubt in this.

2. Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India (1978):

This case dated back to the time when journalist Maneka Gandhi's passport was confiscated by the government and they had not provided any reason for their actions. Aggrieved by this, she approached the Supreme Court of India and filed an action against the government for violating her fundamental right under Article 14, Article 19 and Article 21 of the Indian Constitution.

This judgment mark a pivotal shift in Indian Constitutional Law by broadening the scope of Article 21 and recognized the right to live with dignity, right to clean environment, right to legal aid and many other are the essential human rights. Its real significance lies in that one must adhere to the principle of fairness and natural justice so as to prevent the arbitrary actions.

3. Vishaka and Others v. State of Rajasthan (1997):

Sometimes, history remembers a judgment not only because of what the court decide but because of why the court had to decide it in first place and this case is the perfect example. This case deals with the protection of women in the workplace. The important takeaway from this case is that there must be a safer working environment for women and their fundamental rights must also be protected. They must also be heard.

This was the case where for the first time the Visakha Guidelines were framed by the Supreme Court of India for protecting and securing the rights of women against sexual harassment at their workplace. This case has shaken the entire nation and came into news when Bhanwari Devi, a social worker was brutally gang raped while preventing the child marriage.

4. Shreya Singhal v. Union of India (2015):

This is one of the most significant judgment in India's constitutional history. Now a days, internet has become one of the most powerful platform for expressing opinions, sharing ideas, raising their voice against injustice through social media. The biggest loophole here is that if you are raising your voice, then you got arrested, how is this right? And why is nobody raising any question?

That's where this case came into light. In this case, two young women were arrested for posting Facebook comment on Bharat Bandh after the death of a political leader. They challenge Section 66A of the Information Technology Act, 2008. The court held this unconstitutional as it violates Article 19(1) (a)-Right to freedom of speech and expression under the Constitution of India.

5. Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) v. Union of India (2017):

This case concerns with the privacy of the citizens. We know that our life totally depends on smartphones. We make payments, do online shopping etc. etc. and for this we have to fill certain details or data which has raised a serious question about the privacy. Just ask yourself- Is my data protected? Who are protecting my data? What about my privacy? As the technology was evolving, so is the risk. Privacy is something that must be protected.

To answer these questions, the case of Justice K.S. Puttaswamy came into light. The constitutional bench comprising 9-judges held that Right to Privacy is a fundamental right which is protected under the Constitution of India. Privacy is an intrinsic part of Right to Life and Personal Liberty under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution.

Conclusion-

From the case of Kesavananda Bharati to the case of K.S. Puttaswamy, every judgment has its own story, history and constitutional values. These judgments demonstrated that the constitutional rights are capable of adapting and change from time to time. Every landmark judgment discussed above reflects the court's enduring commitment to justice, liberty, and equality. The story of India's constitution is very well reflected from these judgments. This is the reason why these are remembered not as legal precedents but as a milestone in India's democratic country.