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Landmark Supreme Court Judgement in India

Navya Yadav

Since its inception in 1950, the Supreme Court of India has not merely functioned as the apex judicial institution but also as the constitutional sentinel entrusted with preserving constitutional ideals. The court has consistently elucidated the contours of executive accountability, legislative competence and liberties of individual through its interpretative authority.

The trajectory of Indian constitutional jurisprudence has been fundamentally altered by the several decisions delivered by the Supreme Court. Whether by expanding the ambit of fundamental rights, limiting Parliament's amending power, recognition of emerging civil liberties in the digital age, or advancing gender justice, these judgements have assured the constitution as an organic document capable of responding to changing societal realities and being dynamic.

This blog analyses some of the most remarkable Supreme Court Judgements and examines their withstanding contribution to India's constitutional governance. The following landmark judgements epitomize the Supreme Court's transformative role in shaping constitutional and legal framework of India.

1. **Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala (1973)**

It is regarded as one of the most significant constitutional decision in Indian legal history. The case arose when the constitutional validity of the Kerala Land Reforms Act, 1963 was challenged by Swami Kesavananda Bharati, alleging that fundamental rights to property and religious freedom were infringed by the act. The dispute ultimately lead to examine the extent of Parliament's power to amend the constitution under Article 368. In the landmark thirteen-judge bench judgement with 7:6 majority, it was held that though parliament

possesses wide amending powers, yet it cannot alter the Basic Structure of the Constitution completely.

The court then introduced the Basic Structure Doctrine, preserving the essential constitutional principles such as democracy, secularism, judicial review, federalism and the rule of law, thus safeguarding the constitution from arbitrary constitutional amendments.

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

The interpretation of fundamental rights under the Indian constitution took a turning point due to this case. The case arose when Maneka Gandhi's passport was impounded by the Government of India under the Passport Act, 1967, without furnishing any reasons, prompting her to challenge the action as violative and arbitrary of her fundamental rights. Article 21 and its relationship with Articles 14 and 19 was determined by the Supreme Court. The court held that the expression "procedure established by law" must be fair, just, and reasonable, and not arbitrary and oppressive.

As further ruled by the court, Article 14, 19 and 21 are interconnected, therefore significantly expanding the ambit of the right to life and personal liberty.

3. Vishakha v. State of Rajasthan (1997)

A landmark judgement that significantly advanced the protection of right of women in workplace. The case arose when Bhanwari Devi, a social worker was gang raped after attempting to prevent a child marriage in Rajasthan. The Supreme Court after recognizing the legislative vacuum of non-availability of specific legal framework addressing sexual harassment at the workplace, invoked Articles 14, 15, 19(1)(g), 21 of the Constitution, along with India's obligation under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), to formulate the Vishaka Guidelines.

Preventive and remedial measures to ensure a safe working environment for women were prescribed by these guidelines. It further led to the enactment of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013.

4. Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017)

The case is a landmark judgement recognizing the right to privacy as a fundamental right. The case arose from challenges to the Aadhaar scheme, with the petitioner arguing that the collection of biometric data violated individual privacy. A nine-judge Constitution Bench was constituted to determine whether privacy was protected under the Constitution. In a

unanimous verdict, the Supreme Court held that the right to privacy is an intrinsic part of the rights guaranteed under Articles 14, 19, and 21. The Court observed that privacy encompasses personal autonomy, dignity, and informational privacy, making the judgment a constitutional milestone with far-reaching implications for data protection, surveillance, and digital governance.

5. Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India (2018)

A is a landmark judgment that advanced equality and individual dignity under the Constitution. The case challenged the constitutional validity of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which criminalised consensual same-sex relations between adults. The petitioners argued that the provision violated their fundamental rights under Articles 14, 15, 19, and 21. In a unanimous decision, the Supreme Court held that Section 377, to the extent that it criminalised consensual sexual acts between adults, was unconstitutional. The Court affirmed that constitutional morality must prevail over social morality and recognised the rights to equality, privacy, dignity, and personal autonomy of LGBTQIA+ individuals.

6. Shayara Bano v. Union of India (2017)

Shayara Bano v. Union of India, is a landmark judgment that strengthened gender justice and constitutional equality. The case challenged the practice of **talaq-e-biddat** (instant triple talaq), which allowed a Muslim husband to dissolve a marriage by pronouncing "talaq" three times in one sitting. The petitioner contended that the practice violated her fundamental rights under Articles 14, 15, 21, and 25 of the Constitution. By a 3:2 majority, the Supreme Court declared instant triple talaq unconstitutional and legally invalid, holding that it was arbitrary and inconsistent with constitutional principles of equality and dignity. The judgment paved the way for the enactment of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019.

The landmark judgments discussed above reflect the Supreme Court's indispensable role in safeguarding constitutional values and advancing the rule of law in India. Through its progressive interpretation of the Constitution, the Court has strengthened fundamental rights, promoted social justice, and ensured governmental accountability. These decisions continue to serve as guiding precedents for courts, legislatures, and policymakers. As constitutional

challenges evolve, these judgments remain enduring pillars of Indian constitutional jurisprudence, reaffirming the Supreme Court's role as the guardian of the Constitution.