

Important Supreme Court Judgments for UPSC Mains

The Supreme Court of India has played a crucial role in shaping constitutional law, governance, and fundamental rights. For UPSC Mains, candidates must be well-versed in landmark judgments that have influenced India's legal and political landscape. Here are the **top 10 important Supreme Court judgments** that every aspirant should know:

1. Kesavananda Bharati Case (1973) - Basic Structure Doctrine

Significance: This judgment established the **Basic Structure Doctrine**, which ensures that Parliament cannot alter the fundamental framework of the Constitution.

- The Supreme Court ruled that while Parliament has the power to amend the Constitution (Article 368), it cannot alter its **basic structure**, including democracy, secularism, and judicial review.
- This case helped maintain the balance of power between the judiciary and legislature.

2. Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India (1978) - Expansion of Article 21

Significance: This case broadened the interpretation of **Article 21 (Right to Life and Personal Liberty)**.

- The Supreme Court ruled that “**procedure established by law**” must be just, fair, and reasonable.
- It expanded fundamental rights and introduced the idea that the **right to life includes dignity, travel, and personal liberty**.

3. Indira Sawhney v. Union of India (1992) - Reservation Policy

Significance: This case upheld the **Mandal Commission's recommendations** on OBC reservations.

- The Supreme Court ruled that caste could be a factor for reservations but **capped it at 50%.**
- It introduced the concept of '**creamy layer**' to exclude the affluent among OBCs from reservation benefits.

4. **SR Bommai v. Union of India (1994) - President's Rule & Federalism**

Significance: This case reinforced **federalism** by limiting the arbitrary imposition of **President's Rule (Article 356).**

- It ruled that **President's Rule can be judicially reviewed.**
- Secularism was upheld as part of the **basic structure of the Constitution.**

5. **Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan (1997) - Sexual Harassment at Workplace**

Significance: This case led to the establishment of **Vishaka Guidelines**, which later became the basis for the **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013.**

- The Supreme Court declared **sexual harassment at workplaces as a violation of fundamental rights.**
- It directed organizations to set up Internal Complaints Committees (ICCs).

6. **Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India (2018) - Decriminalization of Section 377**

Significance: This judgment decriminalized **homosexuality** by striking down **Section 377 of the IPC.**

- The Court ruled that **consensual adult relationships are part of the right to life and privacy.**
- It reaffirmed **LGBTQ+ rights** in India.

7. **Shayara Bano v. Union of India (2017) - Triple Talaq**

Significance: This judgment **declared instant Triple Talaq unconstitutional**.

- The Supreme Court ruled that the practice violated **fundamental rights of Muslim women** under Articles 14 (equality) and 21 (life and dignity).
- This led to the **Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019**.

8. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017) - Right to Privacy

Significance: This case declared **privacy as a fundamental right** under Article 21.

- The Supreme Court ruled that **privacy is intrinsic to life and liberty**.
- It impacted Aadhaar-related laws and surveillance policies.

9. Minerva Mills v. Union of India (1980) - Balance Between Fundamental Rights & DPSPs

Significance: This case reinforced the **Basic Structure Doctrine** and the balance between **Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSPs)**.

- It ruled that **amendments cannot violate the Constitution's core principles**.
- It reaffirmed judicial review as a key pillar of democracy.

10. Golaknath v. State of Punjab (1967) - Fundamental Rights Cannot Be Amended

Significance: This judgment initially ruled that **Parliament cannot amend fundamental rights**.

- It held that **Article 368 does not grant the power to amend Part III of the Constitution (Fundamental Rights)**.
- However, this was later overturned by the Kesavananda Bharati case.

Conclusion

These judgments have had a profound impact on Indian governance, fundamental rights, and constitutional interpretation. Understanding these cases helps UPSC aspirants answer questions related to polity, governance, and constitutional law effectively.

Aspirants should study these cases in-depth and relate them to contemporary issues for a comprehensive understanding.

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