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Phone : +91 73059 14348 – [info@iledu.in](mailto:info@iledu.in) / [Chairman@iledu.in](mailto:Chairman@iledu.in)



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## INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE JUDICIAL TRENDS OF THE SUPREME COURT OF INDIA : A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF RIGHTS, EQUALITY, AND DEMOCRATIC VALUES IN RECENT CONSTITUTIONAL DECISIONS

**AUTHOR – C NANMARAN\* & R.NALINI CHANDRASEKAR\*\***

\* STUDENT AT SCHOOL OF LAW, VELS INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND ADVANCED STUDIES  
(VISTAS)

\*\* ASSISTANT PROFESSOR AT SCHOOL OF LAW, VELS INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND ADVANCED  
STUDIES (VISTAS)

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### 1. Introduction

The development of constitutional law in India cannot be fully understood in isolation from international legal principles. In an increasingly interconnected world, constitutional courts frequently engage with global human rights standards to interpret domestic laws. The Supreme Court of India has consistently acknowledged the importance of international norms in shaping constitutional values, particularly in areas relating to human dignity, equality, and freedom.<sup>1</sup> Although India follows a dualist approach—where international treaties are not automatically enforceable unless incorporated into domestic law—the judiciary has often relied on international instruments to fill legislative gaps and strengthen the interpretation of fundamental rights. This approach reflects the Court's recognition that constitutional values must align with universally accepted human rights principles.

While reliance on international law enhances rights protection, it also raises concerns regarding judicial overreach and the potential dilution of parliamentary sovereignty.

### 2. Role of International Human Rights Instruments

International human rights instruments provide a comprehensive framework for the protection of individual rights. These instruments influence domestic legal systems and guide judicial interpretation in constitutional matters.

#### 2.1. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, is one of the most significant documents in international human rights law. It establishes fundamental principles such as equality, dignity, liberty, and justice.<sup>2</sup>

Although the UDHR is not legally binding, it has played a crucial role in shaping constitutional frameworks across the world, including India. Many provisions of the Indian Constitution, particularly those relating to fundamental rights, reflect the principles enshrined in the UDHR.

1. International law and constitution studies
2. Universal declaration of human rights, 1948

The UDHR serves as a moral and interpretative guide, but its non-binding nature limits its direct enforceability. Courts must therefore exercise

caution while relying on it, ensuring that domestic constitutional provisions remain the primary source of law.

## 2.2. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

The ICCPR is a legally binding treaty that protects civil and political rights such as freedom of speech, privacy, and fair trial.<sup>3</sup> India is a signatory to this covenant, and its provisions have influenced judicial interpretation in several cases.

The Supreme Court has referred to the ICCPR while interpreting rights under Articles 14, 19, and 21, particularly in cases involving personal liberty and procedural fairness.

While the ICCPR strengthens the protection of civil liberties, its implementation in India remains uneven due to lack of legislative incorporation and administrative challenges.

## 2.3. United Nations Charter

The United Nations Charter emphasizes the promotion of human rights, social justice, and international peace.<sup>4</sup> It provides a broad framework for cooperation among nations and encourages adherence to human rights standards.

The principles of the UN Charter have influenced constitutional interpretation in India, particularly in cases involving international obligations and global governance.

The broad and general nature of the UN Charter makes it less effective as a direct legal tool. However, it plays an important role in shaping the overall approach of courts towards human rights.

## 2.4. Other Treaties and Protocols

Various international treaties and conventions, including those related to women's rights, child rights, and environmental protection, have influenced Indian constitutional law.<sup>5</sup> The Supreme Court has often relied on these instruments to expand the scope of fundamental rights.

The use of international treaties enhances the progressive interpretation of rights but may also lead to inconsistencies if not applied uniformly. Influence on Indian Judiciary The Supreme Court of India has actively used international law as an interpretative tool. In *Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan*, the Court relied on international conventions to frame guidelines for the protection of women at the workplace.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, in privacy and human dignity cases, the Court has drawn upon global human rights principles to strengthen constitutional interpretation. The reliance on international law demonstrates judicial innovation and commitment to global standards. However, it also raises concerns about legitimacy, as unelected judges incorporate international norms without explicit legislative approval.<sup>7</sup>

## Comparative Global Constitutional Trends

Globally, constitutional courts have increasingly adopted a rights-based approach.

Countries such as South Africa and Canada have incorporated international human rights principles into their constitutional frameworks.<sup>8</sup>

The Indian Supreme Court, while influenced by these trends, has developed its own unique approach by combining constitutional provisions with international norms.

India's approach reflects a balance between global influence and domestic autonomy. However, the absence of clear guidelines on the use of international law may lead to selective application.

## Challenges in Implementation

Despite the influence of international law, several challenges hinder its effective implementation in India. These include lack of legislative incorporation, administrative inefficiencies, and limited awareness among citizens.<sup>9</sup> The gap between international commitments and domestic implementation undermines the effectiveness of human rights protection. Courts alone cannot ensure

compliance; coordinated efforts from all branches of government are required.

### **Sovereignty vs Global Norms**

One of the key debates in the use of international law is the tension between national sovereignty and global norms. While international standards promote uniformity and protection of rights, they may conflict with domestic priorities and cultural values.

The judiciary must strike a balance between respecting international obligations and preserving constitutional sovereignty. Excessive reliance on international law may lead to questions about democratic legitimacy.

### **Conclusion**

The international perspective plays a significant role in shaping constitutional interpretation in India. The Supreme Court has effectively used international human rights principles to expand the scope of fundamental rights and promote justice.

However, the reliance on international law also raises important questions regarding implementation, consistency, and judicial authority. The effectiveness of this approach depends on maintaining a balance between global standards and domestic constitutional principles.

International law serves as a powerful tool for strengthening rights, but its use must be guided by clear principles to avoid inconsistency and ensure democratic legitimacy.





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