

Constitutional Governance and International Human Rights Obligations in India

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.63345/jccls.v2.i2.201>

Shalu Jain

Research Scholar

Department of Law

Maharaja Agrasen Himalayan Garhwal Univeristy

Pokhra, Pauri Garhwal, Uttarakhand, India

Dr. Vijay Kumar

Research Supervisor

Department of Law

Maharaja Agrasen Himalayan Garhwal Univeristy

Pokhra, Pauri Garhwal, Uttarakhand, India



<http://www.jccls.org/> || Vol. 2 No. 2 (2026): May Issue

Date of Submission: 04-04-2026

Date of Acceptance: 17-04-2026

Date of Publication: 05-05-2026

Abstract— Constitutional governance and human rights protection are closely interconnected within democratic legal systems. India, as the world's largest democracy, has developed a constitutional framework that seeks to safeguard individual freedoms, ensure equality, and promote social justice while fulfilling its international human rights obligations. This study examines the relationship between constitutional governance and international human rights commitments in India by analyzing constitutional provisions, international human rights instruments, judicial interpretations, and institutional mechanisms. The paper explores how Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles of State Policy, and judicial review contribute to the protection of human rights within the constitutional framework. It further evaluates India's engagement with major international human rights treaties, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The study highlights the significant role played by the judiciary in harmonizing domestic constitutional principles with international human rights standards through progressive interpretations and landmark judgments. While India demonstrates substantial commitment to human rights protection, challenges relating to implementation, institutional effectiveness, and balancing security

concerns with individual freedoms continue to persist. The paper concludes that strengthening governance institutions and enhancing compliance mechanisms are essential for ensuring greater alignment between constitutional governance and international human rights obligations in India.

Keywords— Constitutional Governance; Human Rights; International Human Rights Law; Fundamental Rights; Judicial Review; International Treaties; India

INTRODUCTION

Constitutional governance represents the framework through which governmental power is exercised in accordance with constitutional principles, the rule of law, and the protection of fundamental rights. In democratic societies, constitutions serve not only as legal documents establishing institutions of governance but also as instruments for safeguarding human dignity, liberty, equality, and justice. The protection of human rights has consequently become a central component of constitutional governance, reflecting both domestic

constitutional values and internationally recognized legal standards.

India, as the world's largest constitutional democracy, has developed a comprehensive legal framework for the protection and promotion of human rights. The Constitution of India, adopted in 1950, incorporates an extensive range of rights and freedoms through Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles of State Policy, and constitutional remedies. These provisions collectively establish a legal foundation that seeks to protect individual liberties while promoting social and economic justice. The constitutional commitment to democracy, secularism, equality, and human dignity has significantly influenced the development of human rights jurisprudence in the country.

At the international level, human rights have evolved through various conventions, treaties, and declarations, particularly following the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948. India has actively participated in the international human rights regime and is a party to several major human rights instruments, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). These commitments impose obligations upon the State to respect, protect, and fulfill internationally recognized human rights standards.

frequently referred to international human rights principles while interpreting constitutional provisions, thereby contributing to the harmonization of domestic and international legal norms. Nevertheless, challenges relating to implementation, institutional effectiveness, socio-economic inequalities, and national security concerns continue to influence the realization of human rights within the constitutional framework.

This paper examines the relationship between constitutional governance and international human rights obligations in India. It analyzes constitutional provisions, international legal commitments, judicial developments, and institutional mechanisms to evaluate the extent to which India's constitutional system aligns with international human rights standards and addresses contemporary human rights challenges.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between constitutional governance and international human rights obligations in India has attracted significant scholarly attention. Existing literature broadly examines the constitutional foundations of human rights, the incorporation of international norms into domestic law, the role of the judiciary, and the challenges of implementation.

Early scholarship by Upendra Baxi (2002) emphasized that the Indian Constitution embodies a transformative vision of justice and human dignity, enabling the protection of both civil-political and socio-economic rights. Similarly, H. M. Seervai (1996) argued that Fundamental Rights and judicial review constitute the core mechanisms through which constitutional governance safeguards individual liberties.

Scholars such as M. P. Jain (2018) and V. N. Shukla (2019) have highlighted the central role of Articles 14, 19, 21, and 32 in ensuring constitutional protection of human rights. Their analyses demonstrate that constitutional governance in India extends beyond formal legal structures and incorporates substantive principles of equality, liberty, and dignity.

The interaction between international human rights law and domestic constitutional law has been extensively studied by S. K. Kapoor (2015), who observed that India generally follows a dualist approach but increasingly permits judicial reliance on international norms when domestic legislation is silent. This position is reinforced by B. P. Singh Sehgal (2017), who noted that Indian courts have frequently drawn upon international human rights instruments to expand constitutional protections.

Several studies focus on judicial activism as a mechanism for harmonizing constitutional governance with international human rights standards. Sathe (2002) argued that Public Interest

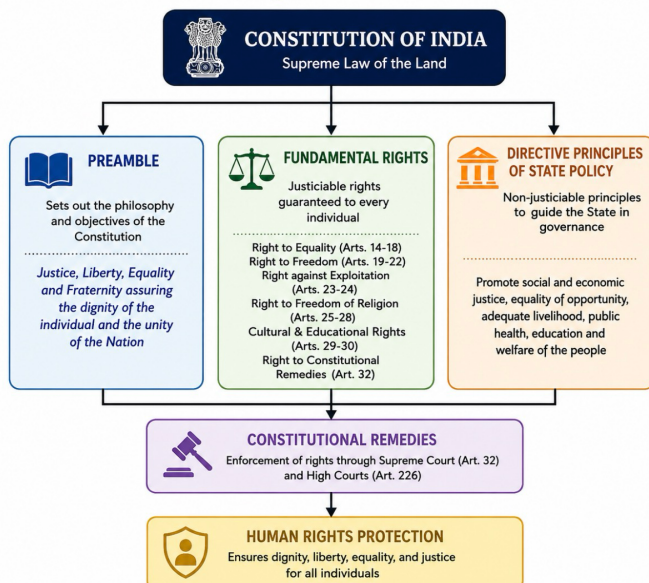


Fig. 1: Constitutional Framework for Human Rights Protection in India

The interaction between constitutional governance and international human rights obligations has become increasingly significant in contemporary legal discourse. Indian courts have

Litigation transformed access to justice and enabled courts to address systemic human rights violations. Bhagwati (1985) similarly viewed judicial innovation as essential for protecting vulnerable populations and advancing constitutional objectives.

Research examining landmark decisions such as *Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan* (1997), *Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India* (1978), and *Justice K. S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India* (2017) demonstrates how international human rights principles have influenced constitutional interpretation. These decisions expanded the scope of dignity, privacy, equality, and procedural fairness within Indian constitutional jurisprudence. Article 21 has particularly evolved into a broad source of human rights protection through judicial interpretation.

Human rights scholars including Basu (2015), Agrawal (2016), and Narain (2018) argue that despite strong constitutional safeguards, significant implementation challenges remain. Issues relating to custodial violence, gender discrimination, freedom of expression, minority rights, and national security legislation continue to generate debate regarding India's compliance with international human rights obligations.

Recent literature further emphasizes the importance of institutional mechanisms such as the National Human Rights Commission and State Human Rights Commissions. Studies indicate that while these institutions contribute to accountability and awareness, concerns persist regarding enforcement capacity and institutional independence. The Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993, provides an important statutory framework linking domestic governance with international human rights principles.

Overall, the literature suggests that India's constitutional framework demonstrates substantial alignment with international human rights standards. However, scholars consistently identify gaps between constitutional commitments and practical implementation, highlighting the continuing need for legal reform, institutional strengthening, and effective enforcement mechanisms.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a doctrinal and descriptive legal research methodology to examine the relationship between constitutional governance and international human rights obligations in India. The research primarily relies on the analysis of legal texts, constitutional provisions, international human rights instruments, judicial decisions, and scholarly literature. A doctrinal approach is particularly appropriate because the study seeks to evaluate legal principles, constitutional norms, and the extent of India's compliance with internationally recognized human rights standards.

The research utilizes both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary sources include the Constitution of India, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and other relevant international human rights conventions. Judicial decisions delivered by the Supreme Court of India and various High Courts have also been examined to understand the practical application and interpretation of constitutional and international human rights principles.

Secondary sources comprise academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports, publications of national and international organizations, and authoritative commentaries on constitutional law and human rights. These sources provide theoretical perspectives and scholarly analyses relevant to the study.



Fig. 2: Major International Human Rights Instruments Influencing India's Human Rights Commitments

The study employs content analysis and comparative legal analysis to evaluate the interaction between constitutional governance and international human rights obligations. Particular attention is given to constitutional provisions, judicial interpretations, and institutional mechanisms that facilitate the protection of human rights in India. Through this analytical framework, the research assesses both the strengths and challenges associated with aligning domestic constitutional governance with international human rights standards.

CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION IN INDIA

The Constitution of India provides a comprehensive framework for the protection and promotion of human rights. Adopted on 26 January 1950, it embodies the principles of justice, liberty, equality, and dignity that form the foundation of democratic governance. The constitutional framework reflects both national aspirations and internationally recognized human rights values, making the Constitution a central instrument for safeguarding individual freedoms and ensuring social justice.

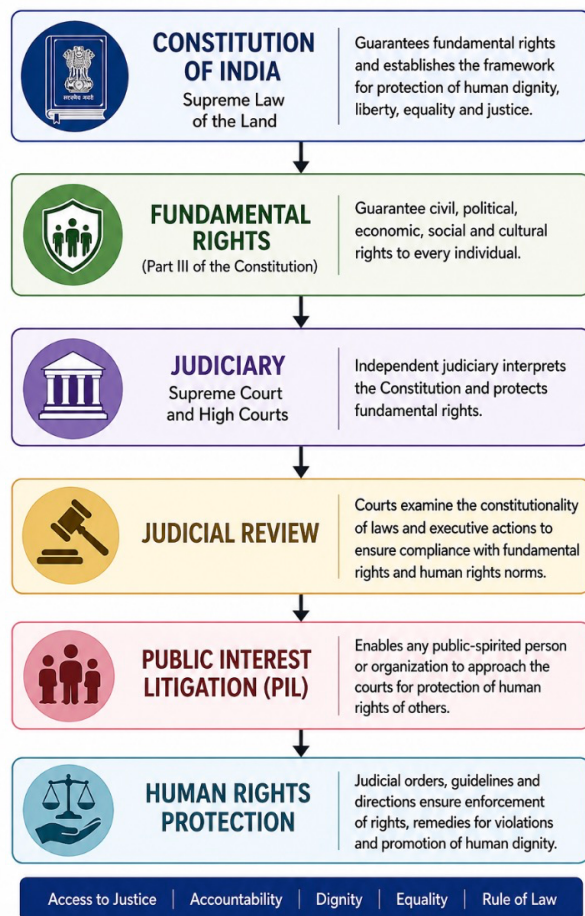


Fig. 3: Constitutional Governance and Judicial Enforcement Mechanism

The Preamble serves as the philosophical foundation of the Constitution and expresses the commitment of the State to secure justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity for all citizens. These principles closely correspond with the core values recognized in international human rights instruments and guide the interpretation of constitutional provisions relating to human rights.

Fundamental Rights, contained in Part III of the Constitution, constitute the primary mechanism for the protection of human rights in India. Articles 14 to 18 guarantee the right to equality and prohibit discrimination on grounds such as religion, race,

caste, sex, or place of birth. Articles 19 to 22 protect essential civil and political freedoms, including freedom of speech and expression, freedom of association, freedom of movement, protection against arbitrary arrest, and personal liberty. Article 21, which guarantees the right to life and personal liberty, has received expansive judicial interpretation and has become the cornerstone of human rights protection in India. Through judicial decisions, the scope of Article 21 has been extended to include rights relating to privacy, health, education, livelihood, a clean environment, and human dignity.

The Constitution also provides specific safeguards against exploitation through Articles 23 and 24, which prohibit human trafficking, forced labor, and child labor in hazardous occupations. Articles 25 to 30 protect freedom of religion and cultural and educational rights, thereby preserving religious freedom and minority rights. These provisions contribute significantly to the protection of diversity and pluralism within Indian society.

In addition to Fundamental Rights, the Directive Principles of State Policy contained in Part IV of the Constitution promote social and economic justice. Although not directly enforceable by courts, these principles guide the State in formulating policies aimed at reducing inequality, improving living standards, ensuring equitable distribution of resources, and protecting vulnerable sections of society. Many socio-economic rights recognized under international human rights law find expression within these constitutional directives.

The Constitution further strengthens human rights protection through constitutional remedies under Article 32 and Article 226. These provisions empower citizens to approach the Supreme Court and High Courts for the enforcement of their rights. Judicial review enables courts to examine governmental actions and legislation that may violate constitutional guarantees. Over the years, the judiciary has played a transformative role in expanding the scope of rights and ensuring accountability within constitutional governance.

Collectively, the Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles of State Policy, and constitutional remedies create a robust legal framework for human rights protection. This framework demonstrates India's commitment to constitutional democracy and provides the foundation for aligning domestic governance with internationally recognized human rights standards.

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS OBLIGATIONS OF INDIA

India is an active participant in the international human rights system and has consistently affirmed its commitment to the protection and promotion of human rights through its membership in the United Nations and its ratification of

numerous international human rights instruments. These international commitments impose obligations upon the State to respect, protect, and fulfill the rights and freedoms recognized under international law. The integration of international human rights principles into domestic governance has become an important aspect of India's constitutional and legal framework.

The foundation of the modern international human rights regime was established through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. Although the Declaration is not legally binding, it has significantly influenced the development of international human rights law and constitutional systems worldwide. Many rights contained in the UDHR, including equality before the law, freedom of expression, protection against discrimination, and the right to dignity, are reflected in the Constitution of India and have guided judicial interpretation of constitutional rights.

India is a State Party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which guarantees rights such as the right to life, liberty, equality, fair trial, freedom of religion, freedom of expression, and political participation. Ratification of the ICCPR requires India to ensure that domestic laws and governmental actions comply with these internationally recognized standards. Indian courts have frequently referred to ICCPR principles while interpreting constitutional provisions relating to personal liberty, procedural fairness, and human dignity.

India has also ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which recognizes rights relating to education, health, employment, social security, and an adequate standard of living. The objectives of the ICESCR correspond closely with the Directive Principles of State Policy contained in the Indian Constitution. Government policies concerning education, public health, poverty alleviation, and social welfare reflect efforts to fulfill these obligations.

In addition, India is a party to several specialized human rights conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). These treaties require the adoption of legal and policy measures aimed at eliminating discrimination, protecting vulnerable groups, and promoting equality and inclusion. Legislative initiatives such as laws addressing gender-based violence, child protection, and disability rights demonstrate India's efforts to implement these commitments.

Despite substantial progress, challenges remain in translating international obligations into effective domestic

implementation. Concerns relating to gender inequality, custodial violence, freedom of expression, minority rights, and access to justice continue to attract attention from international monitoring bodies and human rights organizations. Effective implementation often depends upon administrative capacity, institutional accountability, and judicial enforcement.

Overall, India's participation in major international human rights treaties reflects a strong commitment to global human rights norms. While constitutional provisions and legal institutions provide an important foundation for compliance, continued efforts are required to strengthen implementation mechanisms and ensure the practical realization of internationally recognized human rights standards throughout the country.

CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNANCE AND JUDICIAL ENFORCEMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Constitutional governance in India is founded upon the principles of the rule of law, separation of powers, judicial independence, and protection of fundamental rights. Within this framework, the judiciary plays a pivotal role in ensuring that governmental actions remain consistent with constitutional mandates and human rights standards. The Supreme Court of India and the High Courts have emerged as key institutions in the protection and advancement of human rights through judicial review, constitutional interpretation, and enforcement of fundamental rights.

The Constitution empowers the judiciary to act as the guardian of constitutional values. Articles 32 and 226 provide citizens with direct access to the Supreme Court and High Courts for the enforcement of fundamental rights. Through these provisions, courts have developed an extensive body of human rights jurisprudence that has significantly expanded the scope of constitutional protections.

One of the most important developments in Indian constitutional law has been the expansive interpretation of Article 21, which guarantees the right to life and personal liberty. Initially interpreted narrowly, Article 21 has evolved into a comprehensive source of human rights protection. Judicial decisions have recognized numerous derivative rights, including the right to dignity, privacy, health, education, clean environment, legal aid, shelter, and livelihood. This dynamic interpretation reflects the judiciary's commitment to ensuring that constitutional governance remains responsive to changing social realities and international human rights standards.

Public Interest Litigation (PIL) has further strengthened judicial enforcement of human rights. The relaxation of traditional rules of locus standi enabled public-spirited individuals and organizations to seek judicial intervention on behalf of

disadvantaged and marginalized groups. Through PIL, courts have addressed issues relating to bonded labor, prison conditions, environmental protection, child welfare, gender justice, and access to education. This innovation significantly enhanced access to justice and broadened the reach of constitutional protections.

Indian courts have also relied upon international human rights principles while interpreting constitutional provisions. In situations where domestic law is ambiguous or silent, international conventions and treaties have frequently been used as interpretative tools. This approach has facilitated the harmonization of constitutional governance with international human rights obligations and has contributed to the progressive development of human rights jurisprudence.

Table 1: Landmark Judicial Decisions and Human Rights Protection

Case	Year	Human Rights Contribution
Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India	1978	Expanded the scope of personal liberty and due process under Article 21
Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan	1997	Established guidelines against workplace sexual harassment using international norms
D.K. Basu v. State of West Bengal	1997	Strengthened safeguards against custodial violence and arbitrary detention
Unni Krishnan v. State of Andhra Pradesh	1993	Recognized education as a fundamental right
Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India	2017	Recognized the right to privacy as a fundamental right

Table 2: Judicial Mechanisms for Human Rights Enforcement

Constitutional Mechanism	Purpose
Article 32	Enforcement of Fundamental Rights through the Supreme Court
Article 226	Enforcement of rights through High Courts
Judicial Review	Examination of constitutionality of laws and executive actions
Public Interest Litigation	Access to justice for disadvantaged groups
Constitutional Interpretation	Expansion and protection of human rights through judicial decisions

The judiciary's contribution to constitutional governance extends beyond dispute resolution. Courts have played a transformative role in advancing social justice, promoting accountability, and ensuring that governmental institutions function within constitutional limits. By expanding the scope of rights and incorporating international human rights principles into constitutional interpretation, the judiciary has strengthened the protection of human dignity and individual freedoms. Consequently, judicial enforcement remains one of the most significant mechanisms through which constitutional governance supports human rights protection in India.

CHALLENGES IN HARMONIZING CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNANCE AND INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS

Despite the substantial alignment between India's constitutional framework and international human rights obligations, several challenges continue to affect the effective harmonization of domestic governance with global human rights standards. These challenges arise from legal, institutional, socio-economic, and security-related factors that influence the implementation and enforcement of human rights protections.

One of the major challenges relates to the gap between legal guarantees and practical implementation. Although the Constitution provides extensive protection of fundamental rights, the realization of these rights often varies across different regions and social groups. Socio-economic inequalities, poverty, illiteracy, and limited access to justice can restrict the effective enjoyment of constitutionally guaranteed rights and internationally recognized freedoms.

National security concerns also create tensions between constitutional governance and human rights protection. Laws enacted to address terrorism, public order, and internal security are often criticized for their potential impact on civil liberties, due process rights, and freedom of expression. Balancing the legitimate interests of national security with the protection of individual rights remains a complex challenge for policymakers and judicial institutions.

Institutional limitations further affect compliance with international human rights standards. Human rights bodies, oversight institutions, and enforcement agencies frequently face challenges related to resource constraints, procedural delays, and implementation of recommendations. While institutions such as the National Human Rights Commission contribute significantly to accountability and awareness, concerns regarding their effectiveness and enforcement powers continue to be discussed in academic and policy literature.

Another challenge arises from the incorporation of international human rights obligations into domestic law. India generally

follows a dualist approach, requiring legislative action for the direct implementation of treaty obligations. As a result, certain international commitments may not receive full domestic effect unless supported by specific legislation or judicial interpretation.

Additionally, emerging issues such as digital privacy, artificial intelligence, cyber surveillance, environmental protection, migration, and minority rights present new human rights challenges that require continuous legal adaptation. Addressing these concerns necessitates stronger institutional mechanisms, effective policy implementation, and sustained commitment to constitutional values.

Therefore, while India's constitutional governance framework demonstrates considerable compatibility with international human rights standards, overcoming implementation gaps and institutional challenges remains essential for ensuring comprehensive and effective human rights protection.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of constitutional provisions, international human rights instruments, judicial decisions, and institutional mechanisms demonstrates that India possesses a strong legal foundation for the protection of human rights. The Constitution of India incorporates principles of equality, liberty, dignity, and justice that closely correspond with internationally recognized human rights standards. Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles of State Policy, and constitutional remedies collectively establish a comprehensive framework that promotes both civil-political and socio-economic rights.

A significant finding of the study is the substantial convergence between constitutional governance and international human rights obligations. Many rights recognized under international instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) are reflected in constitutional provisions and judicial interpretations. This convergence has enabled India to maintain a legal system that is broadly consistent with global human rights norms.

The judiciary has played a particularly important role in strengthening this relationship. Through judicial review and progressive constitutional interpretation, courts have expanded the scope of fundamental rights and incorporated international human rights principles into domestic jurisprudence. Landmark decisions concerning privacy, gender equality, environmental protection, legal aid, and personal liberty illustrate how constitutional governance has evolved in response to changing societal needs and international legal developments.

However, the analysis also reveals the existence of implementation challenges. While legal protections are extensive, the practical realization of human rights remains uneven. Socio-economic disparities, administrative inefficiencies, delays in the justice delivery system, and limited awareness of rights often hinder effective enforcement. Concerns relating to custodial violence, discrimination, freedom of expression, and the impact of certain security-related laws continue to generate debate regarding the extent of compliance with international human rights standards.

Institutional mechanisms such as the National Human Rights Commission, State Human Rights Commissions, and judicial institutions contribute significantly to accountability and oversight. Nevertheless, their effectiveness may be enhanced through stronger enforcement powers, improved coordination, and greater resource allocation. The growing importance of issues such as digital privacy, technological surveillance, environmental sustainability, and minority protection further highlights the need for continuous legal and policy adaptation.

Overall, the analysis indicates that India's constitutional governance framework demonstrates substantial commitment to international human rights principles. While notable progress has been achieved through constitutional safeguards and judicial intervention, strengthening implementation mechanisms and institutional capacity remains essential for ensuring the effective realization of human rights across all sections of society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The effective harmonization of constitutional governance and international human rights obligations in India requires continuous legal, institutional, and policy reforms. Strengthening the implementation of constitutional guarantees should remain a priority to ensure that human rights protections are translated into meaningful outcomes for all citizens.

Greater emphasis should be placed on improving access to justice, particularly for marginalized and vulnerable communities. Expanding legal aid services, simplifying judicial procedures, and reducing case backlogs would contribute to more effective enforcement of fundamental rights. Human rights education and public awareness programs should also be enhanced to promote greater understanding of constitutional rights and international human rights standards.

Institutional mechanisms such as the National Human Rights Commission and State Human Rights Commissions should be provided with greater operational autonomy, adequate financial resources, and stronger monitoring capabilities. Enhanced coordination among governmental agencies, judicial

institutions, and human rights bodies would improve accountability and compliance with human rights obligations.

Legislative and policy reforms should be periodically undertaken to ensure consistency between domestic laws and evolving international human rights standards. Particular attention should be given to emerging issues such as digital privacy, cyber governance, environmental rights, gender equality, and minority protection. Furthermore, regular review of laws affecting civil liberties and national security would help maintain an appropriate balance between public safety and human rights protection.

Through these measures, India can further strengthen constitutional governance and enhance the effective realization of its international human rights commitments.

CONCLUSION

Constitutional governance and human rights protection are fundamentally interconnected within India's democratic and legal framework. The Constitution of India provides a comprehensive system of rights, institutional safeguards, and judicial remedies that collectively promote the principles of justice, liberty, equality, and human dignity. Through Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles of State Policy, and judicial review, the constitutional framework establishes a strong foundation for the protection and advancement of human rights.

The study demonstrates that India's constitutional provisions exhibit substantial consistency with major international human rights instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). India's participation in these international frameworks reflects its commitment to upholding globally recognized human rights standards. The judiciary has played a particularly significant role in bridging constitutional principles and international obligations through progressive interpretation of rights and the development of an extensive body of human rights jurisprudence.

At the same time, the research identifies several challenges that continue to affect the effective realization of human rights. Socio-economic inequalities, implementation gaps,

institutional limitations, and the need to balance security concerns with civil liberties remain important areas of concern. Emerging issues relating to technology, privacy, environmental protection, and social inclusion further require continuous legal and policy adaptation.

Overall, India's constitutional governance framework provides a robust mechanism for human rights protection and demonstrates a strong commitment to international human rights obligations. Continued institutional strengthening, effective implementation of legal safeguards, and sustained adherence to constitutional values will be essential for ensuring that human rights protections are accessible, meaningful, and equitable for all individuals in contemporary Indian society.

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