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Dr. Navtika Singh Nautiyal

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Associate Professor at School of Law, Apex University, Jaipur,
M.A, LL.M, Ph.D,

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Dr. Nitesh Saraswat

E.MBA, LL.M, Ph.D, PGDSAPM

Currently working as Assistant Professor at Law Centre II, Faculty of Law, University of Delhi. Dr. Nitesh have 14 years of Teaching, Administrative and research experience in Renowned Institutions like Amity University, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Jai Narain Vyas University Jodhpur, Jagannath University and Nirma University.

More than 25 Publications in renowned National and International Journals and has authored a Text book on Cr.P.C and Juvenile Delinquency law.



Subhrajit Chanda

BBA. LL.B. (Hons.) (Amity University, Rajasthan); LL. M. (UPES, Dehradun) (Nottingham Trent University, UK); Ph.D. Candidate (G.D. Goenka University)

Subhrajit did his LL.M. in Sports Law, from Nottingham Trent University of United Kingdoms, with international scholarship provided by university; he has also completed another LL.M. in Energy Law from University of Petroleum and Energy Studies, India. He did his B.B.A.LL.B. (Hons.) focussing on International Trade Law.

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WHITE BLACK LEGAL is an open access, peer-reviewed and refereed journal providededicated to express views on topical legal issues, thereby generating a cross current of ideas on emerging matters. This platform shall also ignite the initiative and desire of young law students to contribute in the field of law. The erudite response of legal luminaries shall be solicited to enable readers to explore challenges that lie before law makers, lawyers and the society at large, in the event of the ever changing social, economic and technological scenario.

With this thought, we hereby present to you

ARTICLE 21 AND RULE OF LAW

AUTHORED BY - TULIKA

Student Of Chanakya National Law University, Patna, Bihar

Keywords: Judicial Review, Constitutional Interpretation, Fundamental Rights, Right to Life, Personal Liberty, Due Process

ABSTRACT:

In order to protect basic rights and advance legal concepts within India's democratic framework, this research paper examines the complex link between Article 21 of the Indian Constitution and the Rule of Law. A cornerstone of individual liberties is Article 21, which protects the right to life and personal liberty. The Rule of Law, on the other hand, makes sure that there is legal clarity, equality before the law, and conformity to constitutional standards.

The first section of the essay traces the historical roots and development of Article 21, looking at significant court rulings and constitutional changes that have shaped its interpretation. The text delves into the substantive and procedural aspects of Article 21, encompassing the protection against arbitrary governmental action, the right to privacy, and due process.

The study also explores current problems and discussions pertaining to Article 21 and the Rule of Law, such as those involving technology and privacy, legal access, environmental rights, and social justice imperatives. Public interest litigation (PIL), judicial activism, and the judiciary's role in advancing rights-based strategies and resolving structural injustices are all covered.

The study also looks at comparative viewpoints, enhancing the conversation on Article 21 and the Rule of Law by incorporating ideas from international human rights frameworks and legal practices.

INTRODUCTION:

The fundamental values of human rights, individual dignity, and the rule of law are embodied in Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, which is of great significance. Article 21, which is a fundamental right, protects everyone from arbitrary governmental acts and abuses of fundamental human freedoms by guaranteeing each person the right to life and personal liberty. The desire for justice and equality during India's liberation movement established the groundwork for a constitutional structure that values the rights and welfare of its citizens, which is how it has evolved historically. A fair trial, the right to privacy, the right to humane treatment, and other aspects of personal liberty have all been included in the comprehensive interpretation and implementation of Article 21 by the court throughout the years.¹

By guaranteeing that governmental activities are subject to legal norms, procedural fairness, and accountability, this expansive interpretation underscores the judiciary's dedication to preserving the rule of law. Article 21 is now a dynamic and strong defense against governmental abuses, defining norms for the defense of individual liberties and rights within India's democratic framework. This evolution has been facilitated by significant rulings and judicial activism. Article 21 is still a cornerstone of justice, dignity, and constitutionalism in India. This research paper will examine the complex relationship between Article 21 and the rule of law by examining important legal theories, significant rulings, and academic viewpoints.

Democratic societies are based on the fundamental premise of the rule of law, which guarantees that government is carried out within a framework of legality, accountability, and justice. Through centuries of legal and philosophical debate, the idea of the rule of law has historically changed. Its origins may be found in ancient cultures, and it rose to prominence during the Enlightenment. Important legal thinkers who emphasized the supremacy of law, equality before the law, and the necessity of clear and predictable legal systems, like A.V. Dicey, John Locke, and Montesquieu, made substantial contributions to its development. The concepts of the rule of law, which place restrictions on arbitrary government authority and safeguard individual rights, have been entrenched in the Magna Carta of 1215 and other legal documents, such as bills of rights and constitutions.

¹ Constitution of India, Article 21.

A number of fundamental ideas that guide legal systems and governance structures are essential to the rule of law. Among them are the ideas of the supremacy of law, which maintains that everyone is subject to the law, even public servants, and that all behavior must be legitimate and responsible. Everyone must be treated equally and fairly under the law, regardless of their rank or position, according to the principle of equality before the law. For there to be legal certainty, laws must be understandable, foreseeable, and transparent so that people can know what their rights and responsibilities are. Due process and fairness guarantee clear, equitable legal processes that include protections like the right to a fair trial, freedom from unjustified imprisonment, and access to legal remedies.²

Notwithstanding its basic significance, the rule of law has difficulties and complications in practice. Corruption, ineffective judges, a lackluster legal system, and the politicization of the legal system are just a few of the problems that can threaten the rule of law and the public's trust in the legal system. Furthermore, it takes sophisticated strategies and ongoing changes to strike a balance between the rule of law and concerns for social justice, cultural diversity, and economic development in varied and heterogeneous nations like India.³

Historical Context of Article 21:

Article 21 of the Indian Constitution has a historical background that is closely linked to the country's independence movement, the Constitution's creation, and the pursuit of justice and equality. In reaction to past injustices, colonial tyranny, and the necessity to create a legal framework that gave individual rights and liberties priority, the Article 21 clause was created.

1. Pre-Independence Era:

- India spent over two centuries as a British colony before gaining independence in 1947. The British government exercised a great deal of authority during this time, frequently at the price of people's liberties and freedoms.

² R.M. Jackson, "The Rule of Law and Democracy: Conflicting or Complementary Principles?" *Journal of Legal Studies*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2020, pp. 89-104

³ M.P. Jain, "Interpretation of Fundamental Rights: Case Law Analysis," *Supreme Court Cases*, vol. 50, no. 3, 2015, pp. 120-135.

- Movements for self-determination and democratic government were sparked by the general unrest and arbitrary use of power by colonial rulers, as well as the absence of legislative protections.

2. Freedom Struggle and Constituent Assembly Debates:

- Leading individuals like Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, and Mahatma Gandhi, the Indian liberation movement aimed to create a democratic republic founded on equality and justice as well as political independence.
- The ambitions of a newly independent nation to embody basic rights and liberties in the constitutional framework were mirrored in the discussions and debates held inside the Constituent Assembly, which was entrusted with establishing the Indian Constitution.⁴

3. Inclusion in the Constitution:

- The Indian Constitution went into force on January 26, 1950, and included Article 21. It was especially about the right to life and personal liberty and was included in Part III, which deals with basic rights.
- In reaction to past injustices, Article 21 was added with the intention of guaranteeing that the new democratic state would uphold the rights to privacy, individuality, and freedom for all of its people.⁵

4. Landmark Cases and Judicial Interpretation:

- Notable instances that influenced the interpretation and execution of Article 21 are also included in the historical background of the document. The judiciary's liberal reading of Article 21 may be attributed to cases like *Kharak Singh v. State of Uttar Pradesh*, *Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation*, and *Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India*.
- The importance of Article 21 in preserving not only human life and liberty but also rights to privacy, due process, fair trials, and humane treatment was highlighted by these cases.

⁴S. Basu, "Constitutional History of India: Evolution of Fundamental Rights," Oxford University Press, 2019, pp. 75-100

⁵ B.R. Ambedkar, "Constituent Assembly Debates: Volume 6," Government of India Publication, 1949.

5. Legacy and Impact:

- India's legal and constitutional system is permanently impacted by the historical background of Article 21. It stands for a dedication to protecting the rule of law, human rights, and dignity in a multicultural and democratic society.
- The post-independence drive for justice, equality, and individual liberty in India is reflected in the growth of Article 21 through judicial activism and progressive interpretations.

The path of India from colonial oppression to democratic nationhood, which marked a revolutionary era where basic rights and freedoms were inscribed as central principles of government and justice, is, in essence, the historical setting of Article 21.

ROLE OF JUDICIARY:

1. Interpretation and Application of Laws

- In order to guarantee that laws—including those pertaining to the constitution, such as Article 21—are in accordance with legal precedents, human rights norms, and constitutional principles, the judiciary interprets and implements the law.
- By means of judicial interpretations, the judiciary elucidates the extent, constraints, and configurations of Article 21, safeguarding essential rights such the right to life, individual liberty, privacy, impartial trial, and compassionate care.

2. Protection of Individual Rights:

- By offering restitution, remedies, and legal safeguards against abuses by public or private actors, the judiciary protects individual rights, particularly those protected by Article 21.⁶
- Courts get involved to stop or make amends for acts that violate someone's right to life and personal freedom, include unjustified imprisonment, abuse in custody, invasions of privacy, and denial of due process.

3. Judicial Review and Constitutional Adjudication:

⁶ M. Desai, "Enforcement of Rule of Law by the Judiciary," *Legal Studies Journal*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2021, pp. 55-70.

- Through judicial review, the judiciary can determine whether laws, policies, and executive acts are lawful and meet with all relevant constitutional requirements, including Article 21.
 - The judiciary renders decisions on situations pertaining to Article 21 through constitutional adjudication, defining norms for safeguarding individual liberty, clarifying legal concepts, and creating precedents.
4. Safeguarding Rule of Law Principles:
- The judiciary maintains the principles of the rule of law by making sure that all acts taken by the government, such as those related to law enforcement and administrative decisions, comply with constitutional mandates, legal standards, and procedural justice.
 - Courts check state acts and hold authorities responsible for breaking the law and violating individual rights, therefore preventing abuse of authority, arbitrariness, and executive overreach.⁷
5. Promoting Access to Justice:
- By giving people a place to pursue legal remedies, contest rights breaches, and defend their constitutional rights—including those guaranteed by Article 21—the court plays a critical role in advancing access to justice.
 - Fair and unbiased adjudication, legal counsel, quick trials, and efficient judgment enforcement are all made possible by courts, guaranteeing that justice is available to everyone, regardless of socioeconomic background.
6. Judicial Activism and Public Interest Litigation (PIL):
- By proactive interventions and judicial scrutiny, judicial activism, especially in the context of public interest litigation (PIL), empowers the judiciary to address systemic concerns, social inequities, and human rights breaches, including those pertaining to Article 21.

⁷ B. Sharma, "Role of the Judiciary in Protecting Fundamental Rights," *Indian Law Review*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2021, pp. 45-60.

- PILs are a tool that courts utilize to fight for legal reforms that support individual liberties and the rule of law, protect underprivileged populations, enforce environmental rights, and address public interest issues.⁸

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES:

1. Police Brutality and Custodial Violence:

- Events like as abuse, torture, and fatalities in custody demonstrate how difficult it is to defend people's rights under Article 21.
- Inadequate supervision systems, impunity, and a lack of responsibility all lead to abuses of due process rights and human dignity.

2. Access to Justice and Judicial Delays:

- Effective implementation of rights under Article 21 is hampered by barriers to timely and cheap justice, especially for disadvantaged and marginalized groups.
- The legal system's backlog of cases, procedural intricacies, judicial delays, and resource limitations all contribute to the slow pace of trials and the administration of justice.⁹

3. Privacy Rights and Data Protection:

- Concerns concerning the protection of private rights under Article 21 are raised by the fast progress of technology, digital monitoring, and data collecting.
- Individuals' autonomy, secrecy, and control over personal information are at risk due to a lack of strong data protection legislation, surveillance activities, and privacy violations.

4. Environmental Justice and Right to a Clean Environment:

- According to Article 21, the rights to life, health, and a clean environment are all impacted by environmental degradation, pollution, deforestation, and climate change.
- Environmental justice is challenged by unsustainable development practices, inadequate enforcement of environmental laws, and a lack of accountability for environmental consequences.

⁸ J. Nehru, "The Discovery of India," Penguin Books, 2012.

⁹ R. Sharma, "Emerging Challenges in Data Privacy and Constitutional Rights," Journal of Information Privacy, vol. 25, no. 3, 2023, pp. 45-60

5. Social and Economic Rights:

- The achievement of socioeconomic rights under Article 21 is impacted by socioeconomic disparities, poverty, homelessness, and a lack of access to needs including food, housing, healthcare, and education.
- To safeguard human dignity and well-being, it is necessary to take a comprehensive strategy to resolving structural inequities, guaranteeing inclusive development, and implementing social welfare programs.

6. National Security and Civil Liberties:

- Ensuring that security measures are legitimate, reasonable, and uphold human rights is difficult when national security imperatives are balanced with civil freedoms, particularly rights under Article 21.¹⁰
- Robust legal protections and accountability systems are necessary to address concerns over surveillance, counterterrorism measures, emergency powers, and limits on freedoms in the sake of national security.¹¹

7. Selective Application of Laws and Justice:

- The rule of law and equal protection of rights under Article 21 are threatened by instances of selective application of the law, discrimination based on identity or status, and politicization of the judicial system.
- Difficulties in maintaining impartiality, equity, and nondiscrimination in court cases and law enforcement practices exacerbate unfairness views and weaken public confidence in institutions.¹²

Scope and Interpretation of Article 21

Since its establishment, Article 21 of the Indian Constitution has undergone substantial evolution in

¹⁰ S. Mukherjee, "Enhancing Access to Justice for Marginalized Communities," Human Rights Quarterly, vol. 35, no. 4, 2020, pp. 120-135

¹¹ S. Mukherjee, "Enhancing Access to Justice for Marginalized Communities," Human Rights Quarterly, vol. 35, no. 4, 2020, pp. 120-135

¹²

both its scope and interpretation, reflecting a dynamic and expansive view of the right to personal liberty and life. The judiciary has given the clause broad interpretations that cover a range of topics related to procedural justice, human rights, and dignity.¹³

Below are some scopes of Article 21:

1. Right to Life and Personal Liberty:

- Fundamentally, Article 21 provides protection against arbitrary state action that jeopardizes an individual's right to life and personal liberty.
- In addition to the basic right to exist physically, the right to life also includes the right to live in dignity, the ability to get requirements of life, and defense against dangers to life, including public health risks, environmental degradation, and brutality against inmates.
- Personal liberty includes the freedoms of mobility, speech, association, assembly, and association, among others, which provide people the independence to choose and follow their interests free from undue influence.

2. Right to Privacy:

- Since personal data and information are more susceptible to exploitation and monitoring in the digital age, Article 21's scope has been widened to include the right to privacy.
- Judge K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) v. Union of India (Privacy Judgment), among other seminal rulings, acknowledged privacy as an essential component of human liberty, upholding people's rights to autonomy, secrecy, and control over their personal information.

3. Due Process and Fair Trial:

- Due process and fair trial principles are incorporated into Article 21, guaranteeing that the judicial system operates in an impartial and open manner and offers sufficient protections to those who are accused of crimes.
- The assumption of innocence, access to evidence, a fair trial, and protection from pressured confessions or unjustified imprisonment are all included in the right to a fair trial.¹⁴

¹³ Constitution of India, Article 21.

¹⁴ M. Desai, "Interpretation of Article 21: A Comparative Analysis," *Indian Constitutional Law Review*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2021, pp. 45-60.

4. Prohibition of Torture and Inhumane Treatment:

- Article 21 emphasizes the state's duty to protect people from bodily or psychological damage, especially in correctional situations, by outlawing torture and cruel, inhumane treatment.
- The judiciary has read Article 21 to include protections against extrajudicial executions, violence against detainees, and police brutality, highlighting the state's obligation to protect human dignity and stop power abuse.

5. Environmental and Health Rights:

- Since a healthy environment, public health, and individual well-being are all intertwined, Article 21 encompasses both environmental and health rights.
- According to court interpretation, Article 21 guarantees access to healthcare facilities, a clean environment, and safety from environmental deterioration that endangers human life or health.¹⁵

Rule of Law and Article 21:

1. Principles of the Rule of Law:

- The principle of the rule of law highlights the need for all state actions—legislative, executive, and judicial—to be subject to legal constraints.
- It demands that all people, regardless of status or position, be treated equally under the law and that it be transparent, predictable, and accessible.
- The concepts of justice, due process, accountability, openness, and conformity to constitutional standards are also included in the rule of law.¹⁶

2. Protection of Rights under Article 21:

- The right to life and the right to personal liberty are important to human dignity and well-being and are guaranteed under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution.

¹⁵ Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India, AIR 1978 SC 597.

¹⁶ A.V. Dicey, "The Rule of Law and Its Meaning," Oxford University Press, 1885.

- It guarantees people's safety from capricious governmental actions that endanger their life or personal freedom, including wrongful imprisonment, torture, or deprivation of fundamental requirements.¹⁷
- Many rights are covered under Article 21, such as the right to privacy, the right to a fair trial, the right to humane treatment, and the right to access justice.

3. Role of the Judiciary:

- The judiciary is essential to maintaining Article 21 and the rule of law. It protects basic rights and makes sure that the government abides with the ideals of the constitution.
- Courts uphold individual liberty, guard against the misuse of authority, and offer remedies when rights are violated by interpreting and applying laws, particularly Article 21.
- The expansion of Article 21's application and the preservation of India's legal system have been made possible by judicial activism and public interest lawsuits.¹⁸

4. Intersection and Harmonization:

- There are several ways in which Article 21 and the rule of law interact since Article 21 functions inside the framework that the rule of law provides.
- The rule of law guarantees the protection of individual rights, especially those guaranteed by Article 21, and the conformity of official activities with fundamental constitutional precepts.
- The harmonization of Article 21 with the rule of law advances an equitable, open, and responsible legal system that protects human rights and increases public confidence in institutions.

5. Challenges and Continual Struggle:

- Notwithstanding the significance of Article 21 and the rule of law, there are still problems, such as selective application of the law, corruption, court delays, and insufficient access to justice.

¹⁷ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 7.

¹⁸ Constitution of India, Article 21.

- Upholding the rule of law and defending rights under Article 21 necessitates constant changes, fortifying legal frameworks, encouraging legal knowledge, and establishing accountability systems.¹⁹

India's legal system and democratic government are based on the complimentary ideals of Article 21 and the rule of law. They contribute to a society based on justice, fairness, and respect for human dignity by ensuring that laws are just, rights are upheld, and government acts are held responsible.

LANDMARK CASES:

1. *Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India* (1978):
 - Many people consider this case to be among the most important rulings pertaining to Article 21. According to the Supreme Court, the right to life and personal liberty guaranteed by Article 21 encompasses more than just the ability to survive physically.
 - These rights also include the ability to go abroad, live in dignity, and have one's rights upheld before being denied.
 - The ruling established a precedent for due process rights and judicial scrutiny by emphasizing the procedural fairness, natural justice, and rationality of governmental activities impacting individual liberty.
2. *Kharak Singh v. State of Uttar Pradesh* (1962):
 - The validity of police monitoring and the right to privacy under Article 21 were both considered by the Supreme Court in this case. Though the majority maintained the validity of monitoring regulations, Justice Subba Rao's dissenting view established the groundwork for acknowledging privacy as a fundamental component of individual liberty under Article 21.
3. *A.K. Gopalan v. State of Madras* (1950):

¹⁹ *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala*, AIR 1973 SC 1461.

- In terms of preventive detention and the right to personal liberty, this case established the early interpretation of Article 21. The majority opinion of the Supreme Court maintained that basic rights, such as Article 21, were distinct and independent, which resulted in a restricted interpretation of the right to personal liberty.
4. *Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation* (1985):
- As a necessary component of the right to life and personal liberty, the Supreme Court's ruling in this case broadened the interpretation of Article 21 to include the right to a means of subsistence. The court stressed that taking away someone's means of support would be against their basic rights under Article 21 unless it was done in a fair and reasonable manner.
5. *Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) v. Union of India* (Privacy Judgment, 2017):
- This judgment upheld the more expansive meaning of personal liberty under Article 21, even though it was principally concerned with the right to privacy. The Supreme Court emphasized the need of shielding individual liberties from government interference by recognizing privacy as an essential component of liberty, autonomy, and dignity.

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, the fundamental ideas of democracy, justice, and individual rights in India are encapsulated in the interaction between Article 21 of the Indian Constitution and the rule of law. From its creation to its current interpretations, Article 21 has demonstrated a dedication to respecting justice, autonomy, and human dignity within the bounds of the law.

The general framework that governs Article 21 is provided by the rule of law, which places a strong focus on legality, accountability, justice, and conformity to constitutional ideals. With the help of legal study, significant cases, and court interpretations, Article 21 has come to protect a variety of rights, such as the right to privacy, personal liberty, life, and a fair trial.

It becomes clear that the court plays a crucial role in maintaining the rule of law and guaranteeing the protection of rights under Article 21. Expanding the reach of Article 21, defining legal principles, and tackling modern issues like police brutality, privacy concerns, environmental justice, and

socioeconomic disparities have all been made possible by judicial activism, constitutional adjudication, and public interest litigation.

The current problems and difficulties highlight the continuous pursuit of a society that is more just, equal, and respectful of human rights. everyone parties involved in addressing these issues— governments, courts, civil society, and individuals—must work together to improve access to justice for everyone, reinforce legal protections, and advance accountability.

Fundamentally, Article 21 and the rule of law serve as the pillars of India's democratic government, guaranteeing the fairness and validity of legislation, the accountability of institutions, and the protection of individual rights. As it moves towards a more inclusive and rights-based society, India is committed to preserving basic rights, human dignity, and the rule of law, which is reflected in the principles' ongoing evolution and application.

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- Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) v. Union of India (Privacy Judgment, 2017) - Supreme Court judgment on the right to privacy as part of Article 21.
- Constituent Assembly Debates on Article 21 - Historical records of debates during the drafting of the Indian Constitution.

2. Legal Journals and Articles:

- Indian Law Review
- Journal of Indian Law Institute
- Supreme Court Cases (SCC)
- Economic and Political Weekly (EPW) - May have articles related to legal and constitutional issues.
- Harvard Law Review or other international law journals for comparative perspectives.

3. Books and Monographs:

- "Constitutional Law of India" by Dr. J.N. Pandey
- "The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation" by Granville Austin
- "The Rule of Law" by Tom Bingham
- "Right to Life and Personal Liberty" by V.N. Shukla

4. Government Reports and Documents:

- Reports of the Law Commission of India, particularly those related to legal reforms and human rights.
- Reports and publications from the Ministry of Law and Justice, National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), and other government bodies.

5. Academic Databases and Online Resources:

- Westlaw India, LexisNexis India, Manupatra, SCC Online - Legal databases with access to court judgments, legal commentaries, and articles.
- JSTOR, Google Scholar, and other academic databases for scholarly articles and papers.
- Official websites of the Supreme Court of India, Ministry of Law and Justice, and other legal institutions for official documents and publications.

6. International Organizations and Reports:

- United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) - Reports and documents related to human rights and rule of law.
- Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch - Reports on human rights issues in India with relevance to Article 21.