BLOGS

Contaminated Water in Indore and the Right to Life under Article 21

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Clean drinking water is something most of us take for granted. We open a tap, fill a glass, and drink without a second thought. But for many residents of Indore, one of India's most celebrated cities, this everyday act recently turned dangerous.

Reports of contaminated tap water leading to widespread illness and deaths have once again drawn attention to a serious but often ignored issue: access to safe drinking water and its direct link to the constitutional right to life under Article 21.

What Happened in Indore?

In recent months, several localities in Indore reported foul-smelling and discoloured tap water. Soon after, hundreds of residents began falling sick with symptoms like vomiting, diarrhoea, fever, and severe dehydration.

Hospitals were overwhelmed as entire families, including children and elderly people, needed medical attention. Tragically, deaths were also reported, with contaminated drinking water emerging as the common link.

Initial investigations suggested that old and damaged pipelines allowed sewage to mix with drinking water lines. Poor maintenance, delayed repairs, and lack of timely testing worsened the situation.

What made the incident even more shocking was that Indore is often projected as a model city for cleanliness and urban governance. The crisis revealed that surface-level cleanliness does not always reflect the condition of essential infrastructure.

Not Just an Indore Problem

Indore is not an isolated case. According to recent reports, more than 5,500 people across India fell sick and at least 34 died in the last year due to contaminated tap water. Cities across multiple

states reported similar outbreaks, mostly caused by sewage entering drinking water pipelines. This points to a deeper, nationwide issue involving ageing infrastructure, rapid urban expansion, and weak monitoring systems.

From a current affairs and general knowledge perspective, this highlights an important reality. India's water crisis is not only about scarcity. It is also about safety, governance, and accountability.

Article 21 and the Right to Safe Drinking Water

Article 21 of the Indian Constitution guarantees the right to life and personal liberty. Over the years, the Supreme Court has consistently expanded the meaning of this right. Life under Article 21 does not merely mean survival. It means living with dignity, health, and basic human necessities.

The courts have repeatedly held that access to clean and safe drinking water is an integral part of the right to life. In cases like ***M.C. Mehta v. Union of India***, the Supreme Court clearly stated that pollution-free water is essential for a healthy life. Similarly, in several environmental and public health cases, the judiciary has linked unsafe living conditions to violations of Article 21.

When people fall sick or die because the water supplied by the State is contaminated, it raises serious constitutional concerns. It is no longer just an administrative failure. It becomes a question of violation of fundamental rights.

Legal Responsibility of the State

Municipal corporations and state governments are legally responsible for providing safe drinking water. This duty flows not only from statutory laws but also from constitutional obligations. Under the public trust doctrine, the State acts as a trustee of natural resources like water and must protect them for public use.

If authorities fail to maintain pipelines, ignore repeated complaints, or delay action despite clear warning signs, they may be held accountable under constitutional law. Courts in India have, in the past, awarded compensation and issued directions when negligence by public authorities resulted in harm to citizens.

The Indore water crisis shows how weak enforcement and lack of preventive planning can directly affect people's lives. It also shows why courts increasingly treat public health failures as rights violations rather than mere policy lapses.

Why This Matters for Exams and Real Life

From a GK and current affairs point of view, the Indore incident connects urban governance, public health, and constitutional rights. For law students and CLAT aspirants, it is a strong example of how Article 21 operates in real life situations. It shows how abstract constitutional principles apply to everyday issues like drinking water.

More importantly, it reminds us that fundamental rights are meaningful only when basic needs are met. A right to life loses its value if people cannot safely drink water in their own homes.

Conclusion

The contaminated water crisis in Indore is a harsh reminder that access to clean drinking water is not a privilege. It is a constitutional right protected under Article 21. When this right is violated, the consequences are immediate and devastating.

As Indian cities continue to grow, ensuring safe water supply must be treated as a constitutional responsibility, not just a development goal. Protecting the right to life begins with protecting the water people drink every day.