BLOGS

Notes on Article 14 of the Indian Constitution

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Introduction

Article 14 of the Indian Constitution is a fundamental right that guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of laws to all individuals within the territory of India. It forms the bedrock of the Indian legal system and ensures that no person is discriminated against on the grounds of race, religion, caste, sex, or place of birth.

Article 14 is located in Part III of the Indian Constitution, which deals with fundamental rights. It is a part of the larger set of rights aimed at ensuring social, economic, and political justice to all citizens of India.

Article 14 of Indian Constitution

Article 14 of the Indian Constitution states, “The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth”.

Equal Protection of Laws and Equality Before Law

Equal Protection of Laws

This concept mandates that the state must apply the law equally and impartially to all individuals. It means that similarly situated individuals should be treated alike under the law without any arbitrary or unjust distinctions.

The principle of reasonable classification is also associated with equal protection. It allows the state to classify individuals into different groups for specific purposes, as long as the classification is rational, based on intelligible differentia, and has a rational nexus with the object sought to be achieved.

Equality before the Law

This principle ensures that all individuals, irrespective of their social or economic status, are equal in the eyes of the law. No person can claim special privileges or be subjected to unfair treatment by the state or its agencies.

It prevents discrimination and ensures that every citizen, regardless of their background, has equal access to justice and legal remedies.

Scope and Applicability of Article 14

Article 14 applies to all persons, whether citizens or non-citizens, within the territory of India. It covers individuals as well as artificial persons such as corporations and other entities.

It applies to all laws and state actions, including legislative, executive, and judicial actions. Even the private actions of state officials or public authorities are covered under this article.

The right to equality does not prohibit the state from making classifications. These classifications are allowed if they are reasonable and have a rational nexus with the objective of the law.

Article 14 permits reasonable classification to meet certain objectives. However, the classification should not be discriminatory or arbitrary. Some factors that the courts have considered while evaluating the reasonableness of classification include intelligible differentia, rational nexus, and the objective sought to be achieved.

Certain laws, such as those related to taxation, may have a reasonable classification based on income levels, but they should not be discriminatory.

Intelligible Differentia under Article 14

Article 14 does not guarantee absolute uniformity in the treatment of all individuals. It allows for reasonable classifications based on intelligible differentia, ensuring fairness and justice without discriminatory treatment.

Intelligible differentia is a crucial concept under Article 14 of the Indian Constitution. It refers to the reasonable and logical basis for classifying individuals into distinct groups for the purpose of legislation. When a law creates a classification among people, there must be a rational and intelligible differentia that sets apart the members of one group from others.

The differentia should be based on real and substantial differences between the groups, and these differences should have a reasonable relation to the object or purpose of the law or state action.

To pass the test of intelligible differentia, the classification made by a law must be reasonable and not arbitrary. The classification should have a rational basis/reasonable nexus to the object of such legislation.

Role of Judiciary in Article 14

The Indian judiciary plays a vital role in upholding the right to equality. The Supreme Court and High Courts have the power of judicial review to ensure that laws and state actions conform to the principles enshrined in Article 14.

The judiciary has interpreted and expanded the scope of equality to include the concept of substantive equality, which seeks to address historical disadvantages and ensure equitable outcomes.

Affirmative action measures, such as reservations in educational institutions and government jobs for socially and educationally backward classes, have been upheld by the courts under the ambit of Article 14

Conclusion

Article 14 of the Indian Constitution is a cornerstone of the nation’s commitment to equality and non-discrimination. It ensures that the state treats all individuals fairly and equally under the law, irrespective of their background.

It guarantees the right to equality before the law and equal protection of laws. It ensures that similarly situated individuals are treated alike, and no arbitrary or discriminatory classification is made.

Also Read: Landmark Cases on Article 14