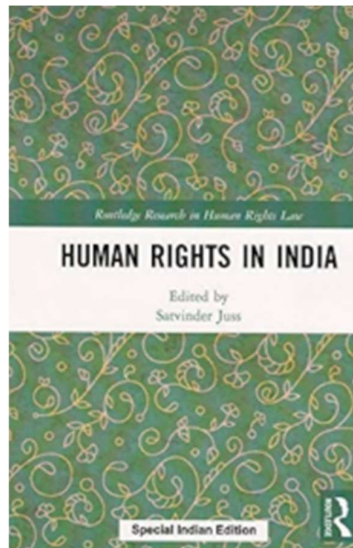


Human Rights in India

Edited by Satvinder Juss



Reviewed by: Siddharth. S. N

Introduction:

The book - Human Rights in India, edited by Satvinder Juss is a timely collection that critically examines the contradictions that are inherently present in the country's human rights framework. The book sets out to examine the gap between the constitutional and legal commitments to human rights in India and the actual delivery of those rights in practice. Through twelve interdisciplinary chapters, it investigates diverse contexts, including freedom of speech, national security, gender violence and global governance. The book offers a multifaceted critique of India's legal, political, and social structures by revealing how human rights are both constitutionally guaranteed and institutionally denied. The book is targeted towards a varied audience including Researchers, Legal practitioners, Activists, Civil society Organisations and most importantly, students in the field of law and public policy

Content Outline:

As Karel Vasak (1997) proposed, human rights can be analysed as an evolution spanning through three generations. The book is structured into three parts containing four chapters each, written by various scholars, legal experts and activists. The structure of the three parts

resembles those of the three generations, where the first part highlights Human rights in a civil libertarian aspect, the second focusing on social rights and the third on the structural and global intersections of Human rights. The book highlighted various case studies and events to point out both the presence and categorical absence of Human rights in India.

Summary:

The opening chapters explore the legal and historical evolution of civil liberties and Judicial review, particularly through free speech cases and the rise of Public Interest Litigations (PIL). With the examination of landmark cases such as Romesh Thapar and Brij Bhushan, and how it culminated in the First Constitutional Amendment of 1951, which limited Article 19, the authors set the foundation for understanding the State's complex relationship with courts, rights and their dissent. These chapters also illustrate how early constitutional interpretations were shaped as much by political pressures as by legal reasoning, highlighting the fragile nature of rights in post-colonial India.

The subsequent chapters tackle issues such as national security laws, the judiciary's reluctance in defending rights in militarized contexts, with the analysis of cases of Nandini Sundar and EEVFAM. The focus gradually shifted to alternative justice mechanisms and how they undermine human rights norms, particularly for women and lower castes. The major focus was given to the abolition of the death penalty on both constitutional and ethical grounds, with the arbitrariness of the 'rarest of rare' doctrines.

The final chapters turn to structural and global dimensions of rights, examining forest rights of Adivasis, the human right to water, being part of Article 21 of the Constitution, as envisaged by the Supreme court and the role of international institution such as the World Bank in shaping policy frameworks that overlook local democratic accountability and social justice, critiquing how economic development, legal formalism, and global governance intersect with and often erode the practical realization of rights for marginalized populations.

Analysis:

Despite the diversity of the contributors and topics of the book, it maintains a structured editorial thread. The principal strength lies in this multidimensional approach, offering rich, contextualized insights towards both theory and practice of Human rights in India. The incorporation of landmark judgements are balanced by the analysis of grassroot protests, informal justice systems and corporate accountability, especially with regard to acid attack victims under gender-based violence. A few chapters are noteworthy for showing how law,

memory and dissent intersect with the State's narratives of security and nationalism. Furthermore, the inclusion of international dimensions within the context, by mentioning India's obligation to international treaties and conventions like CEDAW and the critical lens on the World Bank's development agenda, covering, in the words of Waltz (1959), all levels of analysis.

However, the book faces limitations in the aspect that some essays assume a greater level of legal or theoretical familiarity, which may limit the accessibility of the book for broader audiences or students who are new to this field of study. Another critical area that remains untouched in the work is the issue of caste-based discrimination or the situation of Kashmir, both having contemporary relevance. Additionally, the absence of a concluding chapter that ties together the book's rich insights and offers a clear path forward leaves the reader wanting a sense of closure and direction. After engaging with such a wide range of complex and urgent issues, a unifying reflection would have helped bring the chapters into sharper conversation with one another.

Overall Evaluation:

The book offers exceptional depth in examining the human rights landscape of India. The writing style however, varies across chapters, where many essays are clear, articulate and accessible, some delve into deeper legal and theoretical language that may challenge non-specialist readers or those new to the subject. The variation reflects the diversity of academic backgrounds and methodological approaches among the contributors, but may also require selective reading depending on the reader's familiarity with the subject matter. Considering the value of the book, which is available in different formats, it is worth noting that the hardcover edition is priced at an academic premium. However, it delivers substantial educational and analytical value for institutions, libraries and individuals engaged in human rights work. The depth of analysis, real-world case references, and interdisciplinary insights make it a valuable addition to academic collections and human rights training programs alike. Human rights in India is highly recommended for Interns and staff of Human Rights Commission, Students of Law and legal researches, and Human rights defenders or activists working on gender, civil liberties, environment and indigenous rights. It can be used as a teaching tool or even a policy reference to bridge the gap between legal frameworks and practical realities, empowering readers to critique existing systems and envision more rights-based governance.

References

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Declaration of Human Rights. UNESCO Courier, 30(11), 29–32.

Waltz, K. N. (1959). Man, the state, and war: A theoretical analysis. Columbia University Press.



ABOUT THE REVIEWER



Siddharth S N is currently pursuing his Master's degree in International Relations at Loyola College, Chennai. His academic interests include sustainable development, human rights, and global geopolitics. He has interned with the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), contributing to a research project on manual scavenging. With additional experience in event documentation, international cultural exhibitions, and departmental financial management, Siddharth brings a well- rounded perspective to contemporary global issues. This review reflects his continued engagement with critical human rights discourse.

