

Role of Natural Justice and Police Powers in India

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Introduction

Police powers alongside the principles of natural justice establish a primary foundation for India's constitutional system. The natural connection between these elements lays the foundation for maintaining rule of law which guarantees responsible State power execution through transparent yet compliant fundamental rights protection. Police authorities require their powers to uphold public security as well as criminal investigations, yet they endanger citizens' rights through unpredictable and disproportionate implementations. Natural justice, with its emphasis on procedural fairness, acts as a vital safeguard against the infringement of individual liberties in the name of law enforcement.

The fundamental rights protected in Articles 14 and 21 receive comprehensive interpretations from the judiciary in India to safeguard life and dignity during personal freedom proceedings. Natural justice requires police authorities to follow both legal requirements as well as deliver their duties with fairness and unbiased equity. This research explores the central position of natural justice in monitoring police power operations within India by evaluating fundamental legal principles and essential court decisions and present-day difficulties in this jurisdiction

Concept of Natural Justice: Meaning and Evolution

Within legal processes natural justice represents an essential principle which protects fair treatment resulting in just decisions for human rights scenarios. The unwritten principles direct both administrative bodies and judges to apply principles that emphasize transparency with impartiality as well as ensure equity in all proceedings. Two essential components of natural justice consist of bias restriction (*Nemo iudex in causa Sua*) and hearing rights for all parties (*audi alteram partem*).

The principles grant everyone an opportunity to express their case to an unbiased individual prior to any decision affecting their rights being made. Under these principal individuals who may suffer harm through arrest or detention can learn the basis for those actions and obtain the chance to dispute their legal situation.

The Indian concept of natural justice was first perceived as a moral framework that exceeded legal requirements in the past. However, the landmark case of *Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India*¹ changed the way or perspective about Natural justice. The Supreme Court expanded the meaning of "procedure established by law" in Article 21 of the Constitution by requiring any such procedure to be founded on justice and fairness.

¹ (1978) 1 SCC 248

Through this decision natural justice became a constitutional requirement for the State to uphold fair principles when dealing with personal liberty matters.

Judicial examination of natural justice principles experienced more development since the earlier years. According to the *State of U.P. v. Raj Narain*² the Court declared that transparent justice administration requires the performance of two essential aspects. The execution of natural justice procedures needs both visible clarity and complete transparency to demonstrate fairness and operational transparency in administrative procedures. Through time the principle of natural justice developed into an indispensable protection mechanism to stop State power abuses mainly during police activities.

Natural Justice and Its Relevance to Police Investigations

Natural justice proves essential for police investigations because these investigations create the first connection for individuals to face the criminal justice system. Police authority which includes powers such as arrest and search as well as detainment functions by force and results in serious encroachments of personal rights. Through natural justice police powers should be exercised without arbitrary discretion while procedural safeguards guide their authorization to use authority.

The core principles of natural justice in India are implemented through multiple essential requirements. Audi alteram partem stands as an essential requirement which demands that authorities must inform arrestees of their detention grounds then allow them to challenge these reasons to an unbiased decision-maker. Individuals need early opportunities to challenge police conduct because this requirement stops police from taking actions based on mere suspicions or without solid grounds.

The *Joginder Kumar v. In the State of U.P.*³ (1994) case the Supreme Court defined the essential requirement for an arrest demanding that police officers must possess reasonable grounds proving an offense has been committed. The Court established essential requirements to exercise police power through fair examinations backed by proper prevention mechanisms against abuse. People have the right to maintain their liberty only when police officers provide proper justification accompanied by an explanation of arrest reasons. The decision established itself as a cornerstone in determining how public safety requirements can effectively coincide with human liberties.

Real fairness in police investigations depends heavily on the enforcement of this important principle against bias. Under these principal police investigators must execute their work with absolute impartiality by excluding their personal or political preferences. Individuals and groups face unjust procedures when biased conduct either through obvious prejudices or hidden preferences target them because of their religion, caste or political associations. In *State of Punjab v Balbir Singh* case the court established that police investigations need to conduct free from bias alongside personal motives and must maintain the highest level of fairness.

² AIR 1975 SC 2299, (1975) Supp SCC 1

³ 1994 AIR 1349

Violation of Natural Justice: A Study Through Cases

The Nambi Narayanan Espionage Case⁴

The Nambi Narayanan case demonstrates how law enforcement Devastating outcomes happen when their actions violate principles of natural justice. Narayanan was an ISRO scientist who received false espionage accusations during 1994. The police rushed to arrest Narayanan because of the high-profile nature of the case yet conducted their operation without concrete evidence then abused him through torture which also compromised his basic rights. Lawful procedures remained inactive throughout his detention period which resulted in violations of fundamental justice principles.

Adverse attention was directed at police procedures because there was insufficient supervision of police authority usage. In 2018 the Supreme Court accepted the case of Narayanan and ordered payment for damages because unconstitutional detention and random police arrests challenge both freedom and dignity rights of individuals under the Constitution. The Court condemned police officers based on their conduct on evil behavior and artificial security concerns which they used to create a false narrative.

People need both police authorities to be accountable and proper application of natural justice because they aim to stop such unlawful practices. Police accountability depends on judicial systems as victims who suffer from improper actions need both redress and consequences for people responsible for misconduct.

Custodial Violence and Khwaja Yunus Case

In Khwaja Yunus's⁵ case we find tragic evidence of police brutality while in detention even though laws are designed to protect prisoners. The software engineer Yunus suffered police arrest for his involvement in the 2002 bomb blast. The police kept Yunus in custody when they tortured him before he passed away. Throughout the investigation the police sought to disguise his death by stating that he successfully escaped police custody. The police systematic violation of natural justice guidelines together with their disrespect for human dignity resulted in a grave breach of Yunus's essential rights.

The Bombay High Court investigated Yunus' death and established that police forces invoked natural justice principles improperly through their conduct of torture while requiring no suitable reason behind Yunus' arrest. This decision from the Court strengthened the importance of natural justice to protect Article 21 life rights under the Indian Constitution. The court confirmed that every person standing accused of major offenses should obtain proper legal treatment including protection from harm and living conditions that meet human standards and protection from torture and the assurance of humane conditions in detention.

⁴ S. Nambi Narayanan v. Siby Mathews & Others, (2018) 10 SCC 804

⁵ <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/29244602/>

The Yunus case demonstrates the complete urgency for implementing police reforms that will tackle both the environment of immunity and the practice of custodial torture.

The essential judiciary system plays a vital role by enforcing accountability of law enforcement personnel to protect police abuse victims from getting justice.

Demolitions Without Due Process: The In Re Demolition Cases⁶

The judiciary of India faces an increasing number of illegal demolitions carried out by police forces across the country. During protests or communal conflicts police forces carry out these unauthorized destructions against property belonging to persons under suspicion before legal protocol or hearing rights are respected. The Supreme Court intervened through In Re: Directions in the Matter of Demolition of Structures (2024) to stop the increasing trend of unauthorized property destruction that happened without warning to affected people.

The court acted crucially in this matter because it confirmed that people who face unlawful accusations maintain their right to due process protection. Under Supreme Court verdict (2024), executive-driven destruction and demolition of property remains prohibited since property is protected from random physical alterations regardless of accusation against occupants. According to the Supreme Court, people whose properties were destroyed through executive action must obtain a fair opportunity to petition their case before a court of legal jurisdiction to guarantee natural justice.

The decision delivered an essential message that requires police officers to exercise their responsibilities within the boundaries established by law. This decision reestablished the value of using judicial systems that protect individual rights before taking any disciplinary measures. Through this decision the Supreme Court reaffirmed that procedural fairness should be respected since police powers must exist within their legal boundaries. Such action stands as a breach against the fundamental principles of natural justice particularly through extrajudicial demolitions.

Proportionality and Reasonableness in Police Action

The rules of proportionality together with reasonableness create a framework to ensure that law enforcement actions remain proper for both legal validity and fairness requirements. Any State operation which includes police action needs to align closely with what is needed in each case. All police powers that allow arrests or detentions or employ force must remain proportionate to what authorities determine as an existing danger alongside the gravity of committed offenses.

⁶ WRIT PETITION (CIVIL) NO. 295 OF 2022 WITH WRIT PETITION (CRIMINAL) NO. 162 OF 2022 and WRIT PETITION (CIVIL) NO. 328 OF 2022

The Supreme Court of India dedicates consistent attention to proportionality as a vital legal foundation which establishes a balance between police authority and protection of basic human rights in the Indian legal system. In *Modern Dental College and Research Centre v. The Madhya Pradesh State* ⁷ (2016) Court determined through legal examination that the government actions were proportional to their established goals.

All administrative choices need to remain rational and keep away from excess. The judicial ruling of *Modern Dental College and Research Centre v. State of Madhya Pradesh* (2016) underscored that governmental activities affecting personal liberties should remain in proportion with the targeted goals.

The Supreme Court of India continuously upholds proportionality as an essential foundation which enables police power management alongside fundamental rights protections in the Indian legal domain. In *Modern Dental College and Research Centre v. The State of Madhya Pradesh Case* from 2016 evaluated government action proportions before reaching its determination.

All executive decisions need to be both reasonable and moderate in scope. Through this case the court made clear that State intervention which restricts personal rights needs to remain proportional to their establishment goal.

Police functions that follow the principle of proportionality prevent over-using force while maintaining citizen rights' integrity. An arrest warrant should lead police to consider alternative methods that will minimize damage when there are alternative options for arrest or when less forceful approaches will be effective. Preventive detention situations require special attention to this principle because liberty restriction occurs before trial takes place. Police enforcement of preventive detention needs to show both legal legitimacy and relevancy for containing prospective threats from detained individuals.

The principle of proportionality stands prominently in disputes regarding mass protests and riots along with communal disturbance events. In *Mohammed Zubair v. The Supreme Court* ⁸ issued its ruling against journalist arrest in the State of NCT of Delhi (2022) because it found this issue relevant to the case. According to the Court fundamental rights stemming from Articles 14, 19 and 21 must undergo proportional tests for their necessary use by law enforcement.

The principle of natural justice shields people from facing unjustifiably harsh police enforcement which includes unlawful detention and arbitrary arrests and extrajudicial practices. The police should act within proportionality parameters while supporting valid reasons that justify encroaching fundamental rights and while keeping responses to alleged offenses non-punitive beyond the requirements of justice.

⁷ S.C.R. 579.

⁸ 18 S.C.R. 494

Doctrine of Public Trust: Police as Constitutional Functionaries

As public servants the police duty extends to both law enforcement and keeping public order under control. The Constitution provides police officers with both administrative and constitutional powers to support the State when preserving the rule of law. Police officers maintain the role of State representatives by performing their duties with the strictest ethical standards towards public well-being.

According to the doctrine of public trust, police officers as well as other power holders receive their authority from the state to serve the community rather than pursuing individual gains. This principle is fundamental

The regulation of police conduct requires that their behavior matches with principles of justice alongside fairness and accountability standards. Law enforcement loses public trust when police personnel abuse their power through acts of corruption or through abuses of authority or by violating constitutional rights.

In the case of *Prakash Kadam v. Ramprasad Vishwanath Gupta*⁹, In 2011 the Supreme Court issued a condemnation of police officers due to their involvement in staged lethal confrontations as confirmed through the case of *Prakash Kadam v. Ramprasad Vishwanath Gupta*. According to the Court the misconduct violates individual constitutional rights while simultaneously destroying the public's trust in the law enforcement justice system. Under this decision police officers serving as public servants must follow the law while abusing their power amounts to a breach of public duty.

Natural justice serves as a fundamental principle to protect the integrity of police departments in law enforcement. Functional police officers must show complete accountability to the legal framework of the nation's highest standards. All breaches of natural justice that include illicit force applications or process breaches will trigger serious legal penalties. The protection of basic rights while sustaining public faith in the judicial system becomes the primary purpose of these requirements.

Public trust grants the police strict limitations regarding their use of power which must remain within boundaries of standardized procedures and avoid personal financial gains. Law enforcement professionals must conduct their operations with professionalism and fair treatment and complete openness because their actions solely exist to maintain public well-being. Through natural justice principles this duty reinforces police operational obligations to handle their powers with respect toward individual rights and freedom.

⁹ AIR 2011 SC 1945

Challenges in Enforcing Natural Justice Against Police Powers

The extensive framework of natural justice protection from India's Constitution together with judicial rulings faces major difficulties when seeking enforcement against police power applications. Since impunity serves as a primary barrier the police force faces. The combination between police organization obscure structures and political interference simultaneously provides protection for law enforcement officials who commit misconduct. Police investigations into misconduct encounter multiple delays together with information opacity and biased processes which prevent victims from obtaining justice.

Police abuse victims commonly encounter substantial obstacles when trying to pursue legal solutions for their injuries. The process of filing complaints against police officers usually leads to rejection and subsequent investigations fail to meet satisfactory standards since they frequently display bias. The situation worsens because police complaints authorities suffer from poor autonomy combined with insufficient resources when tackling citizen complaints. The inferior institutional justice systems fail to uphold natural rights policies which results in uncontrolled misuses of power.

Historic biases against minorities as well as Dalits and poor citizens continue to exist throughout the police force. The police force maintains discriminatory practices that utilize racial profiling and enforce caste-based harassment as well as conduct gender-based violence across law enforcement systems. The discriminatory biases which violate Article 14 provisions of the Constitution also prevent natural justice from reaching people who face the greatest risk of police brutality.

The current political environment of India frequently makes the existing problems more severe. The police force sometimes operates at the direction of politicians through law enforcement activities to suppress opposition groups and activists while using this as a cover. The police force becomes susceptible to creating systematic biases when politicized which makes it impossible for them to follow natural justice principles.

Standardized policing reforms must be established to deal with these existing problems. The system requires independent oversight bodies together with transparent investigation processes and strengthened accountability systems to properly hold police officers responsible for their actions. The principles of natural justice should be enforced through established mechanisms to achieve effective police powers.

Recent Developments and Contemporary Judicial Trends

The judiciary has shown a fresh dedication to protect natural justice principles when police misuse their powers in recent times. The Supreme Court has established itself through multiple significant court rulings as an institution which safeguards basic rights against police misconduct in all cases.

The Supreme Court addressed the necessity of protecting constitutional rights through *In Re: Essential Supplies During Pandemic*¹⁰ (2021) despite the ongoing pandemic crisis. The Supreme Court declared that basic human rights protections from executive actions remain necessary when executing emergency powers such as those used during current COVID-19 conditions. The Supreme Court declared under Article 21 that protective measures for life liberty rights cannot be postponed and the police along with other executive bodies must maintain proportionate fair operations.

Through the Manipur Encounter Cases the judiciary established its position to prevent police forces from conducting illegal killings. These cases needed independent investigations because the Supreme Court enforced legal compliance and natural justice principles on police activities in conflict zones.

The Hashimpura Massacre Case¹¹ (2018) resulted in significant convictions being handed down many years later to several police personnel who had committed a mass murder inside legal custody. Through this case the judiciary proved its power to demand police personnel face judicial consequences when they break extreme laws.

New judicial practice reveals advancement in systematic monitoring of natural justice principles while dealing with police misconduct cases. More work is essential to maintain police operations which abide by rules of fairness alongside transparency and accountability principles

Conclusion: Reimagining Police Powers Through the Lens of Natural Justice

Natural justice functions as a vital concept of democratic rule because it establishes protections for individual rights while requiring clear and fair exercise of state-authority. The Indian police force controls extensive powers which require them to follow natural justice obligations both by law and ethical standards. Police must base their actions on principles of fairness alongside transparency to prevent power abuse because these principles safeguard fundamental citizen rights.

The Indian judiciary stands as a vital enforcer of natural justice particularly while dealing with police misconduct cases. The courts have established important judicial precedents that demonstrate the necessity to verify police use of power remains constitutional and respects individuals' rights to due process. Judicial oversight stands as a primary defense against power misuse but comprehensive system changes must be introduced to make these principles operational throughout all police levels. The same legal principles need to be adopted uniformly by all police forces operating at different levels.

¹⁰ Suo Motu W.P. (C) 3 of 2021¹¹ <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/113980221/>

Independence oversight bodies need to be fortified as one essential measure toward this goal. These bodies maintain open investigations to provide clear oversight in all police misconduct examinations including cases of both physical abuse in cells and unlawful deaths during custody. When independent investigations exist, it becomes possible for power holders in leadership positions to face legal consequences. The prevention of abuse concealment depends heavily on immediate investigative transparency which leads victims toward justice.

The solution requires active efforts to remove prejudices based on race and gender and caste from the police organizations. Security forces practice discrimination that leads to unfair treatment under the law because marginalized people become more vulnerable to police abuses. The police perpetrate unnecessary force primarily against vulnerable communities that include Dalits and minorities. To address police biases organizations, need to establish training programs about human rights together with diversity management and inclusion strategies.

Natural justice performs more than mere legal duties when managing police powers because it represents a fundamental duty of morality. Police officers in their position as state representatives maintain great power over personal life cases so these authorities must abide by principles of fairness and accountability and justice. The process of maintaining elevated standards in law enforcement protects both citizens' legal rights and preserves the rule of law against arbitrary state interventions. Law enforcement profession must implement strong legal systems under judicial authority together with self-reform programs to ensure fair and equal treatment for every citizen.

Justice B.R. Gavai of the Supreme Court issued meaningful statements about individual rights and due process in *In Re: Directions in the Matter of Demolition of Structures (2024)*. Demolition projects managed by the State received disapproval from the Court specifically concerning cases with insufficient legal process and prior notification. The application of natural justice requires both legal permission and prior notification to legitimacy operations.

Justice Gavai employed a profound quotation within his judicial decision which stated:

“अपना घर हो, अपना आंगन हो — इस ख़ाब में हर कोई जीता है। इंसान के दिल की ये चाहत है कि एक घर का सपना कभी न छूटे।”

Universal human beings typically seek stability and security as the home serves as a symbol of self-identity and dignity and personal goals. When individuals lose their homes through unauthorized state actions, they face deep damage to their dignity because they lack the ability to oppose the decision-making process. The Supreme Court made its intervention based on both legal demands and ethical principles against state decisions that disregarded fundamental human rights. The importance of procedural justice stands strengthened because the State should provide adequate processes to protect fundamental human rights when carrying out actions.

The judiciary establishes through decisions that natural justice exists beyond procedural matters because it serves as a foundation to protect human dignity. The Court demonstrates the importance of State power limitations to protect both dreams and individual rights of people.