



## From Bench to Buzz: When A Judicial Remark Sparks Public Debate

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### ABSTRACT

In May 2026, remarks attributed to Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant during a Supreme Court hearing generated one of the most intense public debates concerning judicial speech in recent years. Media reports suggested that the Chief Justice had compared certain unemployed youth and activists to “cockroaches” and “parasites,” leading to widespread criticism from lawyers, civil society groups, political commentators, and social media users. Within days, the CJI issued a clarification stating that his remarks had been misquoted and that his criticism was directed not at unemployed youth generally but at individuals who allegedly entered professions through fake or bogus degrees and subsequently undermined institutional integrity.

The judiciary occupies a unique position in a constitutional democracy. Judges are expected not only to interpret and apply the law but also to inspire public confidence in the justice system. In the course of adjudication, judges often make oral observations, comments, and remarks that may not form part of the final judgment. In the age of 24-hour news cycles, social media platforms, and instant public reactions, such judicial remarks frequently travel beyond the courtroom and become subjects of intense public discussion. A single comment made during a hearing can trigger debates on constitutional morality, judicial propriety, freedom of expression, gender justice, religious practices, governance, and public policy.

This phenomenon reflects the increasing intersection between law, media, and public opinion. While judicial observations may serve as tools for probing legal arguments, they can also influence public discourse, affect reputations, shape political narratives, and even impact ongoing investigations. This article examines the nature of judicial remarks, their constitutional significance, their impact on public debate, and the challenges posed by media amplification. It further analyses notable instances where judicial observations generated widespread discussion and evaluates the balance between judicial transparency and judicial restraint.

**Keywords:** Judiciary, Judicial Remarks, Public Debate, Media Trial, Constitutional Law, Freedom of Expression, Judicial Accountability, Social Media.

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### I. INTRODUCTION

In a democracy governed by a rule of law, the judiciary occupies a unique position serving not only as the interpreter of statute but also as a symbol of justice and public trust. Judicial remarks from the bench carries authority and significance, before remarks were heard only by lawyers and litigants but now transferred instantly across the world through digital platform, shaping public opinion and legal discourse. In judicial era, judicial remarks can spark hashtags, headlines and can trigger widespread reactions. Even a word spoken no longer remain confined to courtrooms, transforming court room observation into a national conversations, inviting support, criticism, intense scrutiny from citizens, media and legal experts alike. This phenomena compels us to examine the power and consequences of judicial expression in a democratic society. Should judges be more restrained in their verbal expression or such remarks a legitimate reflection of judicial condor?

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How do such remarks affect public trust in judiciary? This article explores the evolving relationship between courtroom language, media amplification and public response. This article seeks to understand how judicial language increasingly influence both justice and public discourse?

### **UNDERSTANDING JUDICIAL REMARKS**

Judicial remarks generally refer to comments, observations, or questions made by judges during court proceedings. They may be intended to:

- Clarify legal issues.
- Test the strength of arguments.
- Seek explanations from parties.
- Express preliminary concerns.
- Highlight constitutional implications.

Importantly, such remarks are distinct from final judgments. A judgment represents the authoritative legal determination of a case, whereas oral observations often reflect a judge's preliminary thinking.

Courts themselves have repeatedly emphasized that oral observations should not be treated as binding legal pronouncements. However, the public and media frequently perceive these comments as indicators of the eventual outcome of a case.

The distinction between observations and judgments is therefore critical but often overlooked.

### **POWER OF JUDICIAL LANGUAGE IN A DEMOCRACY**

In democratic society, the judicial language is one of the most powerful tool of the judiciary. Words spoken from the bench are backed by institutional legitimacy and have the power to influence not only legal outcomes but also the public trust in justice. A judge's words is not like ordinary communication but carries legal authority and institutional integrity .Their responsibility is not only to determine outcomes of dispute but also shape legal principles, influence public understanding of justice and democratic values.

Even a single statement made by a judge can illuminate complex legal question, influence future decisions and contribute in establishing guiding principles for both courts and society. Every remark from the bench is subject to intense attention , not only by legal community but also by the society as a whole.

In an increasingly digitized world every court room observation is capable of becoming a headline with in minutes, where even a single word can affect institutional credibility and public faith in justice.

### **RIGHT OF FREE SPEECH VS. CRIMINAL CONTEMPT OF COURT**

The corner-stone of the contempt law is the accommodation of two constitutional values - the right of free speech and the right to independent justice. 8 Mere fair comments on the judges or inconsequential contemplation about their decisions should not be the basis for initiating contempt proceedings. The ignition of contempt action should be substantial and malafide interference with fearless judicial action. It has been reiterated by the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India that, the well-settled principle that jurisdiction in contempt is not to be invoked unless there is a real prejudice which can be regarded as substantial interference with the due course of justice. Dissemination of complete information facilitates 'Right to Know'. The right to know, receive and impart information has been recognized within the right to freedom of speech and expression.<sup>10</sup> Right to know has some broad special purposes to serve, including aid in the discovery of truth and strengthening the capacity of an individual in participating in decision making. Muzzling of the free flow of information is pernicious to the idea of institutional checks and balances and is also detrimental to public interest. A blanket ban on the right to freedom of speech and expression holds the power to shake the conscience of this country.

"Let me say at once that we will never use this jurisdiction as a means to uphold our own dignity. That must rest on surer foundations. Nor will we use it to suppress those who speak against us. We do not fear criticism, nor do we resent it. For there is something far more important at stake. It is no less than freedom of speech itself", were the words of Justice Blackburn while elucidating about the Contempt laws. Every and all citizens of a democratic country, may they be statesmen or commoners, have the right to comment outspokenly and fairly on the matters that concern the public at large. It is not a question whether any case is subject to appeal or not; citizens still have the right to point out the judiciary's mistake or call a judgment full of fallacies. Their hands are tied due to the nature of their offices and hence, the only way to let the citizens know, the only way to show vindication is solely through their actions and conduct.

Encroaching upon a citizen's right to express their opinion by initiating contempt proceedings could prove counterproductive as it could lead into resentment and people might actually lose faith in the judiciary. The Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in the case of Rajesh Kumar Singh vs High Court of Judicature of Madhya Pradesh expressed its concern over the growing popular perception about the judges being over-sensitive in contempt matters. It was observed that the misuse of contempt jurisdiction could erode the public confidence in the judiciary. Holmes J. in the case of Regina v. Secretary of State for the Home Department observed that the

right to speech and expression is the lifeblood of democracy that includes the right to fairly criticize in good faith, the work of the court in private or public.

### **JUDICIAL SPEECH AND CONSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITY**

Judges hold a unique constitutional status in India. Their remarks hold institutional power and moral credibility that extend well beyond ordinary public conversation. Consequently, judicial speech is frequently required to embody constitutional morality, moderation, dignity, and sensitivity.

Judges do not operate in a vacuum. Their speech is subject to constitutional expectations that differ from those applicable to ordinary citizens.

The Bangalore Principles of Judicial Conduct emphasize:

1. Independence.
2. Integrity.
3. Propriety.
4. Equality.
5. Competence and diligence.

These principles require judges to exercise caution in public expression because their words may influence perceptions of impartiality.

The Supreme Court has consistently stressed the significance of basic ideals like dignity under Article 21 of the Constitution. The right to dignity is acknowledged as an essential component of the right to life and personal liberty. In this context, critics claim that terminology comparing certain segments of society to pests or parasites undermines the constitutional ethos of respect and inclusion.

The controversy highlights an important constitutional question: may forceful judicial criticism become problematic when it appears to denigrate disadvantaged social groups?

Courts in democratic systems serve more than only as adjudicators; they also protect constitutional principles. Judicial language thus has symbolic meaning. Constitutional courts' harsh criticisms can change public perception, institutional culture, and citizens' trust in the legal system.

Unlike politicians, judges cannot easily clarify or defend themselves through public campaigns. Their authority rests upon restraint and reasoned judgments.

Consequently, judicial speech must be assessed not merely by what is said but by the institutional consequences of what is said.

### **WHY THE REMARKS TRIGGERED SUCH STRONG REACTIONS**

Several factors contributed to the controversy.

- **Youth Unemployment**

India's demographic profile is heavily youth-oriented. Concerns regarding employment opportunities remain central to public discourse.

Any statement perceived as dismissive of unemployed youth naturally attracts attention and criticism.

- **Judicial Authority**

Remarks originating from the office of the Chief Justice carry exceptional weight.

Unlike comments by ordinary public figures, judicial observations are perceived as institutional statements.

- **Social Media Amplification**

Digital platforms accelerated the spread of selected excerpts from the hearing.

Users often encountered isolated quotations without broader context.

- **Symbolic Language**

Terms such as “cockroaches” and “parasites” possess powerful emotional and symbolic associations.

Such language can easily overshadow the broader legal concerns that a speaker may have intended to highlight.

### **EMERGENCE OF COCKROACH JANTA PARTY (CJP)**

*“When the Revolution becomes a joke, even a joke can start a Revolution”.*

That prediction seems to have come true now with the formation of the Cockroach Janata Party or CJP, which started as a sarcastic joke in response to a callous statement by the Chief Justice of India calling unemployed Indian youth ‘cockroaches’.

The “cockroach” label is not just insensitive; it is dehumanizing, elitist, and symptomatic of a broader institutional arrogance that dismisses legitimate grievances as nuisance rather than addressing root causes.

Judges are expected to uphold decorum and constitutional values. Comparing citizens—especially young ones grappling with structural unemployment—to vermin crosses a line. Even the subsequent clarification that the remarks targeted fake-degree holders rang hollow; the damage was done. The original words, delivered from the apex court, framed questioning youth as pests infesting the body politic.

This rhetoric echoes historical dehumanization tactics used to justify exclusion. Cockroaches are resilient survivors, often thriving where systems fail—exactly the metaphor India’s youth might ironically embrace. But coming from the CJI, it signals contempt rather than concern. At a time when millions of graduates compete for a handful of government jobs, when private sector hiring remains sluggish despite “reform” rhetoric, such language pours salt on open wounds.

An entire generation of young Indians is beginning to ask: *What is the point of hard work in a rigged society?* This question is politically explosive, because the rage is not simply about one exam. It is about the feeling that every institution has become transactional. That merit has been auctioned. That democracy itself has been outsourced to wealth, networks and manipulation.

The CJP emerges from this anger. Its symbolism matters because the cockroach is the perfect metaphor for modern India’s invisible majority. This invisibility is not natural, it is politically constructed. The workers, farmers, women, indigenous peoples, workers and youth who sustain society are systematically ignored even though they form the backbone of the country.

India’s political system glorifies billionaires, celebrities and strongmen while treating the people who clean the streets, grow the food, transport the goods, stitch the clothes and build the cities as background noise. But like cockroaches, the invisible are everywhere. And like cockroaches, they survive despite systematic hostility. This is why the symbol works so powerfully among young people. The cockroach is mocked, hunted, sprayed, crushed and insulted, yet it persists. It cannot be eliminated because the entire structure depends upon its labour. The invisible run the visible world.

In some ways, the emergence of the CJP resembles the recent rise of newer political formations like that of Joseph Vijay and his Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam phenomenon in Tamil Nadu. The appeal lies not merely in personality but in rejection. Young voters increasingly reject existing, well entrenched parties, institutions and political languages. They are tired of dynasties, cynical coalitions, ideological hypocrisy and permanent corruption masquerading as governance. They crave disruption. They crave sincerity. They crave a politics that speaks about jobs instead of communal hatred, hospitals instead of hashtags, education instead of televised nationalism.

But this moment also carries danger. History warns us that anger alone does not create transformation. More than a decade and half ago, the Arab Spring electrified the world because ordinary people suddenly discovered their collective power. Dictators who seemed eternal fell within weeks. Yet many of those revolutions were later hijacked, militarized, externally manipulated or crushed because movements built on spontaneous outrage often lacked durable organization and constructive political vision.

The same danger confronts the CJP today. A country as vast and unequal as India cannot be transformed through Gen Z-style flash protests alone. Nepal-style eruptions of youth energy may shake the establishment temporarily, but they cannot by themselves solve structural problems rooted in caste hierarchy, corporate capture, bureaucratic decay, communal polarization and economic inequality.

The Cockroach Janta Party is more than memes and anthems. With tens of millions of followers, it channels Gen Z’s dark humour, AI-generated visuals, and unfiltered rage into a cultural phenomenon. Eligibility: unemployed, lazy by elite standards, professionally ranting online. Its rapid growth signals not foreign conspiracy—as some voices claimed—but organic domestic discontent. Analytics reportedly show overwhelming Indian engagement.

This is democracy’s immune response. When traditional parties fail to address core issues, youth invent new languages of protest. The CJP mocks the establishment’s obsession with religion and polarization while ignoring jobs, education integrity, and economic justice. It highlights how “development” narratives crumble under the weight of ground realities: inflation, stagnant wages, and institutional decay.

The disappointment runs deeper. Youth expected post-pandemic recovery to deliver opportunities. Instead, they face credential inflation, AI-disrupted job markets, and governance that prioritizes optics over outcomes. Systems meant to uplift—education, skilling, employment—have failed spectacularly. The judiciary, meant to be a neutral arbiter, adding insult compounds the alienation.

The “attack on the system” the CJI decried is often citizens exercising constitutional rights—free speech, information access, peaceful protest. Dismissing them as parasites inverts reality. The true threat to the system is its refusal to reform, adapt, and deliver.

What separates the CJP from thousands of viral political jokes is that it arrived with a document — a five-point manifesto that, beneath the sarcasm, contained substantive and pointed demands.

- **NEET Accountability:** A full independent inquiry into the NEET-UG paper leak, the immediate resignation of the Education Minister, and an end to CBSE’s fee for rechecking answer sheets. Student suicides linked to exam fraud are cited directly. The party also released a protest song — “Haan Main Hoon Cockroach” — specifically referencing the examination crisis.

- **Media Independence:** Cancellation of broadcast licenses held by media houses owned by Mukesh Ambani and Gautam Adani, on grounds that these outlets operate as organs of government rather than independent journalism, suppressing accountability reporting.
- **Judicial Integrity:** A ban on any Chief Justice of India being granted a Rajya Sabha seat as a post-retirement benefit — targeting what critics describe as a system of rewarding compliant judges with political positions once they leave the bench.
- **Public Financial Accountability:** A transparent accounting of public funds — specifically rejecting what the manifesto pointedly calls “strategic spending,” a satirical euphemism for corruption.
- **Youth Political Representation:** Structural inclusion of young Indians in formal political processes — not tokenism, but institutional design that gives an entire generation a genuine seat at the table.

These demands are not outlandish. Several have been articulated by mainstream opposition parties, civil society groups, and constitutional experts for years. What the CJP did was package them in a language that 22-year-olds recognised as their own.

## **BRANDING AND VIRAL EXPLOSION OF CJP**

The name CJP is symbolic and intentionally provocative. A cockroach is popularly seen as a creature that survives under any circumstances. Supporters interpret this as a metaphor for the resilience of ordinary people and youth voices in difficult political environments. Critics, however, dismiss it as an attention-seeking gimmick designed purely for virality. Regardless of interpretation, the branding worked.

Its growth was fuelled by several factors:

- Short-form political comedy videos
- Meme-based criticism of establishment politics
- Viral reels targeting current affairs
- Relatable humour for urban youth
- Aggressive use of trending hashtags and internet culture

The movement particularly resonated with first-time voters and digitally active young Indians who increasingly consume political content not through television debates but through Instagram reels, YouTube videos, podcasts, and influencer commentary. These platforms now influence political parties themselves.

The visibility of CJP expanded significantly after discussions and interactions involving well-known digital commentators and opposition-linked figures. Personalities such as Dhruv Rathee and Mahua Moitra referred to or engaged with discussions surrounding the movement online.

This reflects a larger trend in Indian politics: influencers and content creators are increasingly shaping political narratives. Traditional political communication once depended on newspapers, television channels, and public rallies. Today, an Instagram reel or YouTube commentary can reach millions within hours. As a result, political influence is no longer controlled exclusively by political parties or mainstream media institutions.

India has a long history of political satire. From editorial cartoons and theatre performances to street plays and parody songs, satire has often served as a democratic tool for criticism and dissent. CJP represents the digital-age evolution of that tradition.

- Instead of newspaper cartoons, there are memes.
- Instead of pamphlets, there are reels.
- Instead of street theatre, there are viral edits and parody videos.

What makes this movement unique is its ability to convert humour into engagement. Young audiences who might otherwise avoid formal political discussions often participate enthusiastically when politics is presented through comedy and internet culture.

## **II. MEDIA AMPLIFICATION**

The evolution of modern media is fundamentally extended reach of judicial proceedings. The statements in courtrooms quickly move as beyond legal circles and gains the public attention. Media platforms like X(twitter) , live law, NDTV instantly broadcast and interpret the remarks from the bench, extending legal observations into the public spotlight. At the same time, media amplification carries risk when remarks made during proceedings are reported out of context, without legal reasoning that gives them proper meaning. It may lead to incomplete or desorted public interpretations and public responses are influenced more by headlines and hashtags rather than by substance of the case.

In such situations, public focus may move from substantive legal issues to the phrasing of statements by the court. The supreme court of India through its landmark judgements often shown how judicial language can act as a catalyst for social change and guided public thinking beyond the courtrooms. With great judicial authority comes an equally important duty to communicate with accuracy and prudence. Even unintended remarks may damage the perception of fairness and institution credibility.

## **JUDICIAL EXPRESSION V JUDICIAL RESTRAINT**

Should Judges are expected to speak with authority or should that authority allow unrestricted expression? This dilemma created a base for the debate between judicial expression and judicial restraint. Judges are anticipated to speak, question and comment during court proceedings, their role is not limited to listening. This is known as judicial expression, and it is useful to clarify issues, test legal arguments, and guide the course of hearing.

On the other hand, unrestricted judicial expression can create serious concerns. Sharp or controversial statement from the bench may raise doubts about impartiality and lead to public backlash. The legitimacy of institutions depends not only on the factuality of their decisions but also on the manner in which those decisions are communicated. In today's fast paced digital world, this balance has become even more critical. Although judicial conduct is essential in contributing to transparency and democratic dialogue but it must be exercised with caution. The ideal approach lies in balancing authority and the restraint, protecting justice by reinforcing society's trust in the judiciary.

## **JUSTICE SURYA KANT'S REMARK: A CASE STUDY**

### **Background**

The statement was made during courtroom proceedings, where judges engage with counsel through questions, observations and oral comments to understand the legal issues involved. Such issues are often contextual and directed towards the immediate issues before the court. But institutional significance of speakers position transformed it from courtroom observation into a matter of national discussion.

### **Public reaction:**

The different responses to the remark exhibit the evolving dynamics of judicial communication in modern society. Some saw the remark as an instance of judicial honesty and courtroom conduct reflecting the importance of open judicial dialogue. While other section perceived that such language was inappropriate for some holding a constitutional office and could shift focus away from the legal issues involved. This tension reflects that judicial language can become a contested space, where authority, accountability and public perception intersect.

### **Lesson**

The recent public debates surrounding the remark by Justice Surya Kant provides an important lesson to the power and risk of judicial speech. What began as a observation by judge, instantly became a matter of broader discussion, attracting attention from litigants, journalists and the general public. The remark was widely promulgated through digital platforms and traditional media, where it sparked mixed reactions, multiple interpretations and ignited extensive debate.

What began as a spontaneous oral observation soon snowballed into an online storm, eventually giving birth to the Cockroach Janta Party, a satirical political movement founded by Abhijeet Dipke, a Boston-based political communications strategist and former member of the Aam Aadmi Party. Within days, the fledgling outfit reportedly amassed more than 3,50,000 sign-ups and over 20 million Instagram followers. Volunteers have even staged protests dressed in cockroach costumes, turning judicial commentary into internet spectacle.

The Chief Justice later clarified that the remarks had been taken out of context by sections of the media. The clarification stressed that the criticism was aimed only at fraudulent professionals and not at unemployed youth in general. Even so, the controversy struck a nerve because unemployment remains one of the country's most sensitive social concerns. A spontaneous courtroom remark, amplified by social media algorithms, quickly acquired meanings far beyond its original context.

Such episodes are not without precedent. Former chief justices and senior judges have previously faced criticism over oral observations made during emotionally charged hearings or under intense judicial pressure.

In March 2021, while hearing the bail plea of a government employee accused of raping a school student in Maharashtra, then Chief Justice SA Bobde asked the accused's counsel: "Will you marry her?" After a backlash, Justice Bobde clarified that his remarks had been misreported and that he had merely sought to know whether the accused intended to marry the complainant.

Similarly, in February 2025, Justice BR Gavai—months before becoming chief justice—drew criticism during a hearing on urban housing for the poor when he wondered aloud whether welfare "freebies" were producing "a class of parasites". Although the broader context involved integrating the homeless into the mainstream economy, critics argued that the phrase was insensitive and avoidable.

Justice Surya Kant's remarks now appear to fall into the same category: unscripted oral observations that acquire unintended political and social resonance once detached from courtroom context and circulated online.

In some instances, the Supreme Court itself has had to intervene when judicial comments crossed into more serious controversy. In September 2024, the apex court took suo motu cognisance of a viral video in which Justice V Srishananda of the Karnataka High Court referred to a Muslim-majority locality in Bengaluru as

“Pakistan” and made derogatory remarks about a woman advocate. Proceedings were later closed after the judge issued an unconditional apology, but the Supreme Court cautioned judges to exercise restraint and circumspection in courtroom language.

## **COURTS & JUDICIARY**

Another major controversy emerged in December 2024 when Justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav of the Allahabad High Court delivered a speech at an event organised by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. While speaking on the Uniform Civil Code, Justice Yadav made remarks widely criticised as majoritarian and inflammatory, including references contrasting “our Bhagavad Gita” with “your Quran” and using the derogatory term “kathmullah”. Opposition MPs initiated moves seeking his impeachment.

The episode revived attention on the judiciary’s in-house mechanism for addressing judicial misconduct, evolved through a series of Supreme Court judgments in the 1990s. Under this mechanism, the chief justice of India can appoint a three-member committee to conduct a fact-finding inquiry into allegations of misconduct. The process allows for “minor corrective measures”, including advice to resign or retire voluntarily, and even withdrawal of judicial work in extreme cases.

## **A GLOBAL TRADITION OF SATIRICAL DISSENT**

The CJP does not exist without precedent. It belongs to a long, rich, and occasionally world-changing tradition of political satire used as a vehicle for genuine grievance.

Words, however, have histories. The history of these particular words is one of the darkest in human civilisation. In Rwanda, between April and July 1994, more than 800,000 people were killed in 100 days. The killing was preceded by years in which government-allied radio stations systematically called Tutsis ‘inyenzi’, that is, cockroaches. Teachers made Tutsi children stand up in classrooms and called them cockroaches in front of their peers. By the time the machetes came out, an entire population was already stripped of its humanity. The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda later convicted Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines’s (RTLTM’s) leadership for incitement to genocide through precisely this language.

In Nazi Germany, Jews were called ‘parasites’ and ‘rats’. The words appeared in official pamphlets, schoolbooks, and speeches so routinely that it became, as Holocaust scholar Victor Klemperer documented, ‘mechanically and unconsciously absorbed’ by ordinary Germans.

A 2022 study in PLOS ONE analysed Nazi propaganda between 1927 and 1945 and found that Jews were progressively stripped of human mental attributes in the language of state media in the years before the Holocaust. The word ‘parasite’ was not merely an insult. It invoked a biological logic: parasites are not negotiated with. They are removed from the host body.

Ironically, the Jewish establishment later referred to Philistine people as ‘vermin’, leading to dehumanisation of an entire population, whose indiscriminate killing should evoke no human sympathy as per Israel.

In Poland in the 1980s, the Orange Alternative movement used absurdist street theatre — people dressed as gnomes — to mock Soviet-era bureaucracy in a way that was simultaneously impossible to take seriously and impossible to ignore. In Iceland after the 2008 financial crash, the Best Party — a deliberately comedic political formation — won the Reykjavik mayoral election. In Italy, Beppe Grillo’s Five Star Movement began as stand-up comedy before becoming a parliamentary force that, at its peak, became the country’s largest single party.

It is well documented that the words like cockroaches, parasites, vermin, termite have three distinct impacts:

1. It frames the targeted group as exploitative and extractive persons, who attack a healthy body, extract illegitimately from it and weaken and infect the host body (nation/society).
2. It implies the existence of a healthy ‘host’ that must be protected at all costs by removing the parasite.
3. It positions the elimination of parasites as a therapy or a treatment. The violence against parasites is often considered a cure rather than a crime. Exterminating parasites carries no guilt.

That’s why International law, developed in the context of holocaust, Rwanda, Cambodia, Bosnia, Darfur and other atrocities, is unambiguous on dehumanising language:

**The Genocide Convention (1948) prohibits** ‘direct and public incitement to commit genocide,’ which international courts have interpreted to include sustained dehumanising language.

**The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Article 20(2)** requires states to prohibit ‘advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence.’

**The Rabat Plan of Action (UN, 2012)** provides a six-part threshold test for when expression constitutes incitement, including assessment of the speaker’s position of authority.

The pattern is consistent: when formal institutions fail to absorb legitimate grievance, people find unconventional containers for it. Satire works because it cannot be easily delegitimised — you cannot arrest a joke, cannot imprison an irony. But what the CJP demonstrates is that satire, once it finds its target, can evolve quickly into something with harder edges and real demands.

## **THE NEED FOR A MODERN JUDICIAL COMMUNICATION FRAMEWORK**

It goes beyond the offensiveness of the words. The CJI's language reaches places no politician's speech can. When the apex court describes RTI activists and unemployed youth as cockroaches, every subordinate court in India receives a signal about whose grievances are legitimate and whose are not. Every government official who faces an RTI query receives a signal about how to regard the person filing it.

The irony is constitutional and profound. The Right to Information Act exists precisely to enable citizens, including unemployed citizens with no institutional standing, to hold power accountable. Article 19 of the constitution protects free speech and the press. Article 21, interpreted expansively by the Supreme Court across decades, protects the right to live with dignity. The chief justice of India compared those who exercise these constitutionally protected rights to cockroaches. It came from the bench that is their ultimate enforcer.

It is tempting to dismiss the remarks as judicial irritability, an impatient judge venting frustration at a difficult petitioner. But the context isn't reassuring. India in 2026 is a society in which communal polarisation has deepened measurably over twelve years.

Hate speeches have been normalised. Social strife and tension are common. So far it was restricted to minorities, Tribals, Dalits, activists labelled as Urban Naxals etc. But CJI's statement will now be interpreted to paint the unemployed with the same brush. The narrative of hate has a new target, unemployed youth of India.

CJI's statement may have been a conditional and qualified one, targeting the unemployed who assert and ask questions. But the choice of metaphor will not be missed by anyone. It communicates that unemployment is no more an outcome of social and economic policies, that needs to be addressed by those in power. Rather, it effectively paints unemployment as an extortionist crime that needs to be cleansed.

The expansion of digital media has reshaped the reach of judicial speech, making courtroom observations part of public and creating challenge to the judiciary- how to communicate effectively while ensuring institutional dignity and public trust.

Now, the judicial remarks once limited to legal records can become center of public attention within minutes. This transformation makes it essential to rethink how remarks are understood and practiced.

Modern judicial communication framework's purpose is not to curb judicial independence, or limit the judicial expression. Instead it seeks the need for thoughtful, responsible and measured communication, specially in an era where words spoken from the bench often carry results far beyond the courtrooms.

Judges today are not viewed as only interpreter of law but as public institutional voices whose statements can shape public perception of justice. A modern approach would promote awareness of how oral observations are received in digital sphere, while highlighting a balance between openness and judicial neutrality.

## **III. CONCLUSION**

The judiciary stands as cornerstone of democratic governance. The strength of judiciary is not to interpret the law but the confidence and trust it carries in public. In today's world where every remark can be interpreted differently, the responsibility attached to judicial language has grown immensely. As seen in recent controversy involving remark by Justice Suryakant, the judiciary must adapt to a world where even a word matters. To preserve the trust of public requires not only sound judgements but also accurate, careful and thoughtful communication. Therefore, in modern world the judiciary must harmonize judicial expression and restraint ensuring that it's voice to remain influential without compromising the value of neutrality and constitutional accountability. In the end, the strength of judiciary lies as much as in its words as in its verdict.

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