Class 11 Political Science (Indian Constitution at Work) Chapter 9: Constitution as a Living Document - Notes, Important Questions and MCQs (2026-27)

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These Class 11 Political Science Chapter 9 notes cover “Constitution as a Living Document” from the NCERT textbook Indian Constitution at Work (2026-27): why constitutions need to change, how the Indian Constitution is amended under Article 368, why there have been so many amendments, the basic structure doctrine and how the Constitution has remained a living document through judicial interpretation and political practice – with tables, Q&A, 10 MCQs and a free PDF.

Use the table of contents below to jump to the part you need, or read top to bottom for a complete revision of the chapter.

Table of Contents

- Chapter Overview
- Important Topics and Concepts
- Methods of Amendment
- Rigidity vs Flexibility
- Important Definitions and Terms
- Short Answer Questions
- Long Answer Questions
- MCQs with Answers
- Quick Revision Points
- Chapter Summary
- Exam Tips and PYQ Pattern
- Frequently Asked Questions
- Conclusion

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Chapter Overview

A constitution must be stable enough to command respect yet flexible enough to respond to changing needs. India’s Constitution, which came into force on 26 January 1950, has been amended many times, yet its basic framework and values have remained intact.

Article 368 lays down the amendment procedure, which combines flexibility and rigidity. Through the basic structure doctrine and interpretation, the judiciary has ensured that amendments do not destroy the core of the Constitution, making it a living document.

Important Topics and Concepts

Are Constitutions Static?

- Constitutions reflect a society's values but must adapt to new situations.
- Too rigid a constitution may be bypassed; too flexible a one may lose authority.
- The Indian Constitution has endured for over seven decades while being amended.
- Its makers deliberately made it a balance of flexibility and rigidity.

How to Amend the Constitution

- Simple majority of Parliament (not under Art. 368): e.g. creating new states, changing names – treated like ordinary laws.
- Special majority under Art. 368: majority of total membership of each House and two-thirds of members present and voting.
- Special majority + ratification by at least half the state legislatures for provisions affecting federal structure (e.g. distribution of powers, representation of states).
- The President cannot veto an amendment bill; there is no referendum or separate body.

Why So Many Amendments?

- Technical or administrative changes (e.g. retirement age of judges, salaries).
- Different interpretations by judiciary and government led to amendments.
- Political consensus on changes such as anti-defection law, lowering voting age, Panchayati Raj.
- Some controversial amendments were made during the Emergency (1975–77) and later corrected.

Basic Structure Doctrine

- In the Kesavananda Bharati case (1973), the Supreme Court held that Parliament can amend any part of the Constitution but not its basic structure.
- Basic structure includes supremacy of the Constitution, rule of law, federalism, secularism, judicial review, separation of powers and fundamental rights' essence.
- Later cases such as Minerva Mills reaffirmed the doctrine.
- The doctrine balances parliamentary sovereignty with protection of core values.

Constitution as a Living Document

- Judicial interpretation has expanded meanings (e.g. Article 21).
- Political practice and conventions also shape constitutional working.
- Contributions of the Constituent Assembly debates guide interpretation.
- The Constitution remains a framework that grows with the nation while protecting its core.

Methods of Amendment

Most-asked table.

Method	Requirement	Examples of provisions
Simple majority	Ordinary law-making process	New states, citizenship rules, names
Special majority (Art. 368)	Majority of total membership + 2/3 present and voting in each House	Fundamental Rights, DPSP

Method	Requirement	Examples of provisions
Special majority + state ratification	Above + half the state legislatures	Election of President, Union–state powers, representation of states in Parliament

Rigidity vs Flexibility

Feature	Effect
Special majority needed	Prevents casual changes
State ratification for federal matters	Protects states' interests
Simple majority for some provisions	Allows quick changes
No referendum required	Keeps process manageable
Basic structure limit	Core values cannot be destroyed

Important Definitions and Terms

Term	Meaning
Amendment	Change in the Constitution
Article 368	Procedure for amendment
Simple majority	More than half of members present and voting
Special majority	Majority of total membership + 2/3 present and voting
Ratification	Approval by state legislatures
Basic structure	Core features beyond amendment
Kesavananda Bharati case	1973 case establishing basic structure
Rigid constitution	Difficult to amend
Flexible constitution	Easy to amend
Living document	Constitution that evolves with time

Short Answer Questions

Q1. Why do constitutions need amendment?

To respond to changing needs and correct problems while keeping core values.

Q2. Which Article deals with amendment?

Article 368.

Q3. What is a special majority?

A majority of the total membership of each House and two-thirds of members present and voting.

Q4. When is state ratification needed?

For amendments affecting federal provisions such as distribution of powers.

Q5. Can the President veto an amendment?

Q6. What is the basic structure doctrine?

Parliament cannot amend the core features of the Constitution.

Q7. In which case was it established?

Kesavananda Bharati case, 1973.

Q8. Give two reasons for many amendments.

Technical changes and differences in interpretation between courts and government.

Long Answer Questions

Q1. Explain the methods of amending the Indian Constitution.

Simple majority for some provisions like new states.

Special majority in each House under Art. 368.

Special majority plus ratification by half the states for federal provisions.

No referendum; President must assent.

Combines flexibility with rigidity.

Q2. Explain the significance of the basic structure doctrine.

Established in Kesavananda Bharati (1973).

Parliament can amend but not destroy the core.

Protects democracy, federalism, secularism, judicial review.

Balances Parliament and judiciary.

Keeps the Constitution stable yet adaptable.

Q3. Why is the Indian Constitution called a living document?

It has been amended to meet new needs.

Its core values have remained unchanged.

Judicial interpretation expands its meaning.

Political practice shapes its working.

It grows with society while protecting fundamentals.

MCQs with Answers

1. Amendment procedure is in Article(a) 356 (b) 368 (c) 370 (d) 32Answer: (b) 368

2. Special majority requires(a) simple majority (b) 2/3 present and voting + majority of total membership (c) 3/4 of states (d) unanimous voteAnswer: (b) 2/3 present and voting + majority of total membership

3. State ratification is needed for(a) all amendments (b) federal provisions (c) money bills (d) ordinary lawsAnswer: (b) federal provisions

4. Basic structure doctrine case(a) Golaknath (b) Kesavananda Bharati (c) Maneka Gandhi (d)

5. Year of Kesavananda Bharati judgement(a) 1967 (b) 1973 (c) 1980 (d) 1992Answer: (b) 1973

6. Can the President veto an amendment?(a) yes (b) no (c) only once (d) only in emergencyAnswer: (b) no

7. Creation of new states needs(a) simple majority (b) special majority (c) state ratification (d) referendumAnswer: (a) simple majority

8. Ratification requires at least(a) all states (b) half the states (c) one-third of states (d) two statesAnswer: (b) half the states

9. Indian Constitution is(a) fully rigid (b) fully flexible (c) mix of rigid and flexible (d) unwrittenAnswer: (c) mix of rigid and flexible

10. A case reaffirming basic structure(a) Minerva Mills (b) Shankari Prasad (c) Berubari (d) Romesh ThaparAnswer: (a) Minerva Mills

Quick Revision Points

- Constitutions must balance stability and change.
- Three methods of amendment.
- Art. 368: special majority; ratification for federal provisions.
- Reasons for many amendments.
- Basic structure: Kesavananda (1973), Minerva Mills.
- Living document via interpretation and practice.

Chapter Summary

India’s Constitution has been amended many times yet remains stable, because its amendment process under Article 368 balances flexibility with rigidity – simple majority for some provisions, special majority for most, and state ratification for federal matters.

Many amendments were technical or reflected consensus, while some arose from conflicts of interpretation. The Supreme Court’s basic structure doctrine ensures that amendments cannot destroy the Constitution’s core, making it a living document that evolves with society.

Exam Tips and PYQ Pattern

- Learn the three amendment methods with examples.
- Define special majority precisely.
- Remember Kesavananda Bharati (1973).
- Explain “living document” with interpretation examples.
- Use the rigidity–flexibility table in answers.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is this chapter in the 2026-27 CBSE syllabus?

Yes. It is part of the NCERT Class 11 Political Science textbook “Indian Constitution at Work”, prescribed in the CBSE 2026-27 syllabus.

Yes. Use the free PDF link at the top of this page – no signup needed.

How is the Indian Constitution amended?

By simple majority for some provisions, special majority under Article 368 for most, and special majority with state ratification for federal provisions.

What is the basic structure of the Constitution?

Core features like rule of law, federalism, secularism and judicial review that Parliament cannot amend.

Conclusion

Constitution as a Living Document explains how India’s Constitution changes without losing its soul. Learn the amendment table, practise the Q&A here and save the free PDF for revision.

More Notes: Class 11 Political Science (Indian Constitution at Work) Chapter 8: Local Governments notes | Class 11 Political Science (Indian Constitution at Work) Chapter 10: The Philosophy of the Constitution notes | All Class 11 Political Science notes

Author Bio: Written and reviewed by the Nextoper Editorial Team, a group of CBSE political science educators who build chapter notes directly from the NCERT textbook and past board paper patterns.

Freshness Note: These notes follow the NCERT Class 11 Political Science (Indian Constitution at Work) textbook, Indian Constitution at Work (NCERT reprint 2026-27, rationalised syllabus), and the CBSE syllabus for the 2026-27 session. Last checked on 25 November 2026.