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# Evolving Jurisprudence of the Golden Triangle with reference to Article 25 of the Indian Constitution

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## ABSTRACT

*This research paper explores the changing landscape of interpreting Part III the Indian Constitution. It examines the use of an interpretation for specific rights, particularly Articles 14, 19 and 21 while the reading of other fundamental rights is done disjunctively. Over time, the articles 14, 19 and 21 have been collectively been referred to as the "golden triangle", due to the principles established in RC Cooper. However, the reading of merely these three articles collectively was not intended. All fundamental rights must be read collectively as a "seamless web", and not disjunctively, to provide maximum protection of rights. The primary argument made in this paper is that a comprehensive approach primarily based on the proportionality standard should be adopted to evaluate State intervention in practices and reconcile conflicting interests. This is done by using Article 25 as a primary example. The current test under this article has been critiqued and the suggestion of the 'integrated proportionality standard' is being made. This research highlights a changing paradigm in jurisprudence, towards a culture of justification that emphasizes context-nuanced analysis of State actions concerning fundamental rights. This ensures that these actions are reasonable, necessary and proportionate in achieving their objectives.*

**Keywords:** Constitution, ERP, Golden triangle, Proportionality standard

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Indian Constitution, as the foundational legal document, stands as a testament to the country's commitment to safeguarding individual liberties and upholding human dignity. Within this constitutional framework, Part III of the Constitution enshrines an array of fundamental rights designed to protect citizens from arbitrary State action and ensure the preservation of their inherent freedoms. Over time, the judicial interpretation of these fundamental rights has evolved, giving rise to what is commonly known as the "golden triangle." This doctrine, rooted in the collective interpretation of three specific rights - Articles 14, 19, and 21 - has significantly influenced Indian jurisprudence.

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However, the doctrine of the golden triangle has also raised multiple questions regarding the scope of its application in comparison to the broader intent of the Constitution's framers and landmark judgments like *RC Cooper v. Union of India*<sup>2</sup>. This research paper delves into the restricted use of a collective interpretation of specific rights under the Indian Constitution, especially the exclusion of other fundamental rights, and seeks to understand how this limited application has manifested itself. This paper endeavors to shed light on the implications of such an approach to the protection of all individual rights within the Indian legal system.

The "golden triangle" doctrine in Indian constitutional jurisprudence, emphasizing the collective interpretation of Articles 14, 19, and 21, has had a profound impact on the legal landscape. However, it poses a critical question regarding the extent of its application and whether it overlooks other fundamental rights enshrined in the Indian Constitution. The current interpretation of the Constitution appears to give primacy to the interconnected reading of these specific rights, potentially neglecting a more holistic perspective that encompasses the broader intent of the Constitution and other equally vital rights.

This selective approach presents concerns about the underutilization of a proportionality standard to evaluate State actions impacting a wide range of fundamental rights. The limited application of this standard may lead to a disproportionate balance between individual liberties and State interests. It prompts the need to explore whether the Indian legal system has inadvertently confined the scope of the golden triangle doctrine to the detriment of other fundamental rights and, consequently, the overall protection of individual freedoms. The question that poses itself is: How does the restricted use of a collective interpretation of specific rights under the Indian Constitution, specifically the exclusion of an interconnected approach when examining other fundamental rights, manifest itself?

The research methodology employed in this study combines doctrinal research with qualitative analysis to comprehensively investigate the restricted application of the golden triangle doctrine in Indian constitutional jurisprudence. The approach integrates the examination of legal literature, statutes, case law, legal texts, and academic publications to establish the legal framework. This foundation aids in identifying key cases and developments that have shaped the current landscape of fundamental rights jurisprudence in India.

The qualitative research component delves deeper into the interpretation and implications of the golden triangle doctrine and assesses the factors that have contributed to its limited application. This phase of the research involves an in-depth examination of case precedents and legal texts,

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<sup>2</sup> Rustom Cavasjee Cooper v. Union of India, (1970) 1 SCC 248 (Hereinafter referred to as *RC Cooper*)

which are essential in revealing patterns, trends, and explanations for the selective interpretation of fundamental rights within the Indian Constitution. Data collection is a crucial part of this study, primarily reliant on judicial precedents. An extensive analysis of case law provides empirical data that reflects how the golden triangle doctrine is applied in real-world legal scenarios, as well as the consequences of this selective application. This data offers practical insights into the real-world implications of the limited interpretation of fundamental rights under the Indian Constitution. The research culminates in data analysis, adopting a thematic analysis approach. This analysis identifies recurring themes, patterns, and variations within the collected precedents, shedding light on the evolution of the golden triangle doctrine as well as Article 25, the specific rights considered, and the factors influencing its application over time. It reveals the complexities and nuances that have contributed to the restricted interpretation of fundamental rights and the potential consequences of this approach on the overall protection of individual liberties and dignities in India.

## II. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The interpretation of fundamental rights under the Indian Constitution has undergone a significant transformation, with pivotal cases like *AK Gopalan v. State of Madras*<sup>3</sup> and *RC Cooper* shaping the trajectory of interpretative jurisprudence. While *AK Gopalan* initially advocated a siloed reading of fundamental rights, *RC Cooper* introduced a collective and interconnected approach, ultimately leading to the emergence of what is now commonly known as the "golden triangle" – a doctrine that combines the interpretation of Articles 14, 19, and 21 for enhanced rights protection. This paper traces this evolution, highlighting the seminal shift from the strict confines of *AK Gopalan* to the broader perspective established in *RC Cooper*.

*AK Gopalan* focused on how to interpret the phrase "procedure established by law" mentioned in Article 21 of the Constitution. According to this case, the rights outlined in Part III of the Constitution should be read mutually exclusive of each other, i.e. separately and independently. The interpretation given by the Court in *AK Gopalan* led to a framework where each fundamental right was treated individually with its protection limited to its provisions. In this doctrine if there were both a provision and a specific provision governing the right the specific one would take precedence. This approach restricted the scope of rights by emphasizing separation between different Articles disregarding any potential collective or interconnected protection. As a result, it concluded that "procedure established by law" was enough to safeguard liberty focusing on a procedural interpretation. The Supreme Court significantly

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<sup>3</sup> A.K. Gopalan v. State of Madras, AIR 1950 SC 27

overturned the *AK Gopalan doctrine*, in the *RC Cooper* case. In this judgment, the Court adopted an inclusive approach when interpreting fundamental rights. *RC Cooper* declared that similar Articles should be read together to provide protection departing from *AK Gopalan's* approach. The Court rejected the idea that a specific provision should take precedence over one. Instead, it applied an optimization principle prioritizing the protection of rights, over a rigid interpretation rule.

This reading of *RC Cooper* led to what is commonly known as the 'golden triangle'. This doctrine emphasizes the collective reading of three specific Articles within the Indian Constitution: Articles 14, 19, and 21. The combination of these Articles led to a heightened degree of protection for fundamental rights, thereby achieving a more profound level of safeguarding individual liberties.

Each of the three Articles in the golden triangle contributes unique elements to the protection of fundamental rights. Article 14, for instance, ensures non-arbitrariness; Article 19 focuses on reasonability, and Article 21 addresses the due process of law. By collectively interpreting these Articles, the Indian legal system moved away from the original intent of the Constitution makers, who aimed to establish a "procedure established by law," and instead, it evolved into a substantive "due process" system.

### III. THEORETICAL BACKING

The optimization principle of interpreting statutes<sup>4</sup>, based on the three-pronged framework of suitability, necessity, and balancing, plays a foundational role in constitutional law, allowing the judiciary to navigate the intricate terrain of interpreting laws and State actions within the ever-evolving context of contemporary society.

Suitability, the initial step of this approach, is a critical checkpoint in assessing the constitutionality of State actions. It hinges on the fundamental premise that a State should not act arbitrarily but must have a reasonable and justifiable basis for its actions. This basis must be rooted in the Preambular principles and/or Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP). Thus, when scrutinizing a State action, the judiciary evaluates its compatibility with these overarching constitutional values. This requirement acts as a safeguard against arbitrary exercises of State power and ensures that the State's actions are in harmony with the foundational principles of the Constitution.

The second step, necessity, reinforces the principle that the burden on constitutional rights and

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<sup>4</sup> Adrian Vermeule, "Three Strategies of Interpretation," University of Chicago Law Occasional Paper, No. 44 (2005).

principles should be minimized unless there is an absolute necessity to do otherwise. This step underscores that State actions should prioritize measures that do not unduly infringe upon individual rights. In other words, any action that restricts or hinders constitutional rights should be justified as an absolute necessity, and there should be a clear and compelling rationale for the imposition of such burdens. The principle of necessity also obliges the State to explore alternative, less intrusive means to achieve its objectives, ensuring that the least restrictive measures are employed.

Balancing, the final step in this framework, requires a meticulous evaluation of the trade-offs between advancing a directive principle or a preambular goal and the potential encroachment on individual rights. It emphasizes that the constitutionality of a State action depends on whether the benefits to the State's objectives outweigh the costs to individual rights. In cases where the benefits significantly surpass the costs, the State action is considered constitutionally justifiable. However, if the cost to individual rights is disproportionate to the advantages accrued, the action may be deemed unconstitutional. This step serves as a crucial mechanism for maintaining a balance between the collective welfare of society and the fundamental rights of its citizens.

In India, this three-pronged proportionality test has been adapted into a four-step process, as exemplified in the *Modern Dental College & Research Centre v. State of MP*<sup>5</sup>. This modified version introduces additional nuances to the analysis, enhancing the precision of constitutional scrutiny.

The first step, i.e suitability, was split into two aspects. According to this case, the four steps of the proportionality standard are: questioning the legality of the action (not Art. 13(3) definition of law but a legislative action or an executive action backed by legislature), whether the action further a state goal, and the other two steps being necessity and balancing.

#### **IV. THE 'GOLDEN TRIANGLE' AND THE PROPORTIONALITY STANDARD**

In the realm of Indian jurisprudence, the interpretation of the constitutional provisions contained in Articles 14, 19, and 21 collectively forms what is commonly referred to as the "golden triangle." This approach has evolved over the years, largely influenced by landmark judicial decisions, particularly *RC Cooper*. The principle of reading these articles collectively, rather than disjunctively, has had a profound impact on the broader spectrum of rights protected within the Indian legal framework. However, it is essential to recognize that the intention behind the *RC Cooper* judgment extended beyond these specific articles, emphasizing a broader

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<sup>5</sup> *Modern Dental College & Research Centre v. State of MP* (2016) 7 SCC 221 (Hereinafter referred to *Modern Dental College*)

application of this interpretative approach.

The overarching principle guiding the interpretation of the Indian Constitution is that all its provisions, including Articles 14, 19, and 21, should be construed as widely as possible to protect and promote the fundamental rights of individuals. This holistic perspective ensures that the constitutional framework is not merely a collection of isolated provisions but a cohesive system designed to safeguard and enhance the rights of Indian citizens. This approach has become evident in many subsequent legal developments, particularly through the application of the proportionality standard, as articulated in the modern dental college case.

Article 14 of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees the right to equality, has witnessed significant development over the years. The initial jurisprudence, influenced by the landmark case of *The State of West Bengal v. Anwar Ali Sarkar*<sup>6</sup>, established the comparative reasonableness test. Subsequently, the concept of "non-comparable unreasonableness" was introduced in the *E.P. Royappa v. State of Tamil Nadu & Anr.*<sup>7</sup> This concept set the stage for a more refined interpretation, where the focus shifted from mere comparisons to a nuanced understanding of reasonableness. The process eventually led to the establishment of the proportionality standard, in cases where no classification is made. Under this standard, any differentiation in treatment under Article 14 must be proportionate to the objective sought to be achieved. This approach ensures that the rights enshrined in Article 14 are not just nominal but are granted substantial protection.

Certain aspects of Article 15 jurisprudence must be read in tandem with the Article 14 test. For example, when a classification is made under Article 14 based on one of the grounds mentioned in Article 15, such as religion or caste, it triggers a higher level of scrutiny. This is where the principle of proportionality again comes into play. The proportionality standard necessitates a more rigorous examination of State actions to ensure that they are not just rational but are also necessary to achieve a legitimate objective. This standard recognizes that discrimination based on these grounds affects individuals at their core, touching upon their intrinsic and unchangeable traits, and thus demands a more stringent assessment.

This concept was first articulated in the case of *Anuj Garg v. Hotel Association of India*<sup>8</sup>, where the Supreme Court emphasized that any classifications made under the Article 14 test, on the grounds listed in Article 15, were subject to a 'higher level of scrutiny'. A similar line of thought

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<sup>6</sup> *The State of West Bengal v. Anwar Ali Sarkar* 1952 SCR 284

<sup>7</sup> *E.P. Royappa v. State of Tamil Nadu & Anr.* (1974) 4 SCC 3

<sup>8</sup> *Anuj Garg v. Hotel Association of India* (2008) 3 SCC 1

was articulated in *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India*<sup>9</sup>, where it was held that discrimination done on the grounds of Article 15 "discriminates on the basis of the core and intrinsic traits of an individual"<sup>10</sup>. As a result, these classifications must meet a higher threshold to be considered constitutionally valid. The court's decision in *Anuj Garg* essentially established a jurisprudential precedent that has been influential in subsequent cases and continues to be a guiding principle for evaluating State actions related to these sensitive grounds.

In the case of Article 19, which covers a range of freedoms including speech, assembly, and association, the jurisprudence has also seen remarkable development. The foundation was laid in the early cases of *Romesh Thapar v. State of Madras*<sup>11</sup> and *Brij Bhushan v. State of Delhi*<sup>12</sup>, which established a three-pronged test to assess the validity of restrictions. These two cases led to the addition of 'reasonability' as the fourth prong to the test by way of the First Constitutional Amendment, 1951. The reasonability was then interpreted to be that of a 'reasonable man' in *S. S. Rangarajan v. P. Bhagatram*<sup>13</sup>. This interpretation required restrictions on Article 19 freedoms to meet the test of reasonableness as perceived by an ordinary, prudent person. This standard served as a vital mechanism to protect these fundamental rights while allowing for reasonable restrictions. Hence, the modern jurisprudence under Article 19 emphasizes the need for such restrictions to be not only justifiable but also reasonable, again circling back to the proportionality standard.

Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees the right to life and personal liberty, has also undergone a significant transformation in its interpretation. The landmark judgment in *Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India*<sup>14</sup>, introduced a higher level of scrutiny, known as the 'Maneka Gandhi standard'. This standard requires that any procedure established by law, which may deprive an individual of their life or personal liberty, must be just, fair, and reasonable. This standard seeks to ensure that the due process of law is not a mere formality but a substantive safeguard against arbitrary State action. In this context, *Justice K.S. Puttaswamy & Anr. v. Union of India*<sup>15</sup> further refined the Maneka Gandhi standard, essentially reiterating the proportionality test. The substantive and procedural aspects of a law affecting life and personal liberty must conform to the principles of justice, fairness, and reasonableness.

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<sup>9</sup> *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India* (2018) 10 SCC 1

<sup>10</sup> *id.*

<sup>11</sup> *Romesh Thapar v. State of Madras* 1950 SCR 594

<sup>12</sup> *Brij Bhushan v. State of Delhi* (1950) SCR 605

<sup>13</sup> *S. Rangarajan v. P. Bhagatram* 1989 SCC (2) 574

<sup>14</sup> *Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India* 1978 SCR (2) 621 (Hereinafter referred to as *Maneka Gandhi*)

<sup>15</sup> *Justice K.S. Puttaswamy & Anr. v. Union of India* AIR 2017 SC 4161



In this evolving landscape of Indian constitutional jurisprudence, the overarching theme is the adoption of the proportionality standard. This standard serves as a unifying principle that ensures that both the procedure and the substance of a law must meet the highest standards of justice, fairness, and reasonableness. It underscores the importance of balancing individual rights with the legitimate interests of the state, thereby creating a harmonious framework that upholds the principles of justice and equity.

## V. TEST UNDER ARTICLE 25:

However, Article 25 remains to experience a transformative moment akin to the '*Maneka Gandhi* movement,' which revolutionized the interpretation of fundamental rights in the Indian legal landscape. Instead, Article 25 continues to be evaluated through the 'Essential Religious Practices' (ERP) test, which is a three-pronged approach that seeks to delineate the boundaries of religious freedom and regulation.

The first prong of the ERP test necessitates a determination of whether the practice in question is a secular or a religious practice, as only religious practices are protected under Article 25 of the Indian Constitution. This concept was first introduced in the case of *Shirur Mutt*<sup>16</sup>, which established that the belief of the practitioners of a particular faith plays a significant role in discerning whether a practice can be classified as religious. However, this notion was challenged in the case of *Durgah Committee*<sup>17</sup>, a landmark decision delivered by a five-judge bench. The Durgah Committee case asserted that the mere assertion of a practitioner regarding the religious nature of a practice is insufficient. Instead, presenting relevant religious texts or scriptures to the Court is deemed crucial in determining whether a practice falls under the ambit of a secular or religious nature.

The controversy arises from the Court's intrusion into the domain of religious interpretation. In these cases, the Court assumes the role of not just interpreting the law but also of religious texts that hold sacred significance to communities. This interference often results in the Court acting as the ultimate arbiter of what qualifies as 'religious' or not, leading to complex legal and theological conundrums.<sup>18</sup>

The second aspect of the ERP test involves an assessment of whether the practice is essential. *Commissioner of Police v. Acharya Jagdishwarananda Avadhuta*<sup>19</sup> provided a definition for an

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<sup>16</sup> The Commissioner, Hindu Religious Endowments, Madras v Lakshmindra Thirtha Swamiar of Shri Shirur Mutt, AIR 1954 SC 282

<sup>17</sup> Durgah Committee, Ajmer v. Syed Hussain Ali, AIR 1961 SC 1402

<sup>18</sup> Indian Young Lawyers Association v State of Kerala, (2019) 11 SCC 1 (Hereinafter referred to as *Sabrimata*)

<sup>19</sup> Commissioner of Police v. Acharya Jagdishwarananda Avadhuta, (2004) 12 SCC 770

'essential practice' as a religious ritual or practice that is considered integral and fundamental to the expression of a particular faith or belief system. However, further clarification was sought in *Mohammad Hanif Quareshi v. State of Bihar*<sup>20</sup>. This case limited the scope of essential practices to only those that are 'obligatory' or 'mandatory.' This restriction was introduced as a means to clarify the scope of Article 25, as it sought to protect only the most crucial and indispensable practices, as opposed to all practices that might be deemed essential according to the petitioner's contention.

Despite a practice being determined as both religious and essential, it remains subject to textual limitations imposed by Article 25 itself. These limitations are articulated in the form of 'public order, health, and morality.' This introduces a set of checks and balances to ensure that religious practices do not infringe upon the broader interests of society or lead to actions that compromise public welfare. For example, if a religious practice involves actions that incite violence or public disturbances, the State can legitimately curtail or regulate such practices.

The intersection of religious practices, constitutional freedoms, and societal norms has been a recurring theme in Indian jurisprudence. Even when a religious practice is deemed both religious and essential, it is subject to certain textual limitations outlined in Article 25 of the Indian Constitution, which include considerations related to public order, health, and morality. The Sabarimala judgment, delivered by the Supreme Court of India, is a prominent illustration of how these limitations are applied and how they reinforce the anti-exclusion principle in the context of religious freedoms.

For example, in *Sabrimala*, DYC focuses on the limitations and reiterates the anti-exclusion principle and how “even the religious freedom of a denomination is subject to the (anti-exclusion) principle”:

...that the State and the Court must respect the integrity of religious group life and thereby treat the internal point of religious adherents as determinative of the form and content of religious practices) except where the practices in question lead to the exclusion of individuals from economic, social or cultural life in a manner that impairs their dignity, or hampers their access to basic goods.<sup>21</sup>

## VI. CRITIQUE OF ERP

The interpretation and application of Article 25 of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees

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<sup>20</sup> Mohammad Hanif Quareshi v. State of Bihar, AIR 1958 SC 731

<sup>21</sup> Gautam Bhatia, Freedom from community: Individual rights, group life, state authority and religious freedom under the Indian Constitution, Global Constitutionalism, Cambridge University Press (2016) at page 382

the freedom of religion, have been the subject of ongoing legal debates and challenges. In the case of *Saifuddin*<sup>22</sup>, the court declared that it would protect only religious practices and not superstitions, raising a fundamental question about where to draw the line between the two. This distinction is subjective and varies from person to person, as what one person considers a religious practice, another might perceive as a superstition.

The difficulty in distinguishing between religion and superstition is further exacerbated by the narrow scope of protection provided by Article 25. The court's interpretation of Article 25 offers limited protection as it safeguards only those religious practices that are considered 'essential' and 'obligatory'. This limitation arises from the disjunctive reading of Article 25 in isolation from other relevant constitutional articles. As a result, the protection afforded by Article 25 is comparatively weak, and in many cases, individuals might find stronger protection for their rights by claiming cases under Article 19 (freedom of speech and expression) or Article 21 (protection of life and personal liberty).

Justice Chandrachud's opinion in *Sabarimala* highlighted the distinction made between religious and secular practices, which is primarily based on the textual reading of Article 25(2). However, the categorization of religious practices as either essential or non-essential is a creation of judicial interpretation and is not explicitly stated in the Constitution. Chandrachud also criticized the Court's role in determining what is essential to religion, stating, "While deciding what is or is not essential to religion, the court has ventured into areas where it lacks both the competence and legitimacy to pronounce on the importance of specific doctrines or beliefs internal to religion."<sup>23</sup>

This judicial intervention raises concerns as it imposes fewer limitations on State action while placing substantial restrictions on personal liberty. State interference in religious practices should ideally be justified by a legitimate State need that outweighs individual rights and liberties. However, the Essential Religious Practices (ERP) test primarily questions whether the State action follows the correct procedure but does not substantially assess whether the act itself is just, fair, and reasonable. This makes the current test insufficient in terms of its degree of scrutiny.

A more comprehensive approach would be to read Article 25 in conjunction with Articles 14, 19, and 21 of the Indian Constitution. This would allow for the application of a proportionality standard to scrutinize State intervention in religious practices. Justice Chandrachud briefly

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<sup>22</sup> Sardar Syedna Taher Saifuddin vs The State Of Bombay 1962 AIR 853

<sup>23</sup> SABRIMALA, *supra* note 17. paragraph 108

touched upon this idea in his opinion in *Sabarimala*, stating, "Constitutional articles which recognize fundamental rights have to be understood as a seamless web. Together, they build the edifice of constitutional liberty."<sup>24</sup> He emphasized that the fundamental human freedoms in Part III of the Constitution should not be treated in isolation but rather as interconnected rights that collectively form the basis of constitutional liberty.

Chandrachud further argued that the right of a religious denomination must be balanced with the individual rights to which each of its members is entitled under Part III of the Constitution. This viewpoint aligns with the principles established in *RC Cooper* and underscores the need for a holistic and integrated approach to interpreting and applying constitutional rights. It emphasizes that the protection of individual liberties should not be sacrificed in the name of religious practices, but rather, a balance should be struck.

In this broader perspective, the proportionality standard would serve as a valuable tool to assess State intervention in religious matters. It requires the State to demonstrate that its actions are not only rational but also necessary, proportionate, and tailored to achieve a legitimate State interest.

## VII. THE 'INTEGRATED PROPORTIONALITY STANDARD'

The application of the proportionality standard in Indian jurisprudence represents a significant evolution in the assessment of State actions that affect fundamental rights. While not always explicitly articulated in judgments, this framework has been implicitly employed in various cases, signifying a shift towards a more nuanced and context-specific analysis of rights and State interventions. Two notable cases where the proportionality test was implicitly applied are *Akshay Patel v. Reserve Bank of India*<sup>25</sup> and *KKR Majestic Colony*<sup>26</sup>. These cases illustrate the judiciary's growing recognition of the importance of balancing competing interests and ensuring that State actions are reasonable, necessary, and proportionate to achieve their legitimate aims.

In *Akshay Patel*, a division bench judgment authored by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, the concept of an 'integrated proportionality standard' was introduced. This case exemplifies the judiciary's endeavor to harmonize multiple fundamental rights while assessing the proportionality of State actions. The integrated proportionality test is a legal framework used to evaluate State actions that affect multiple fundamental rights or freedoms. It involves a multi-step analysis, as

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<sup>24</sup> *id.*

<sup>25</sup> *Akshay N. Patel v. Reserve Bank of India Writ Petition No.7902/2020* (Hereinafter referred to as *Akshay Patel v RBI*)

<sup>26</sup> *Church Of God (Full Gospel) In. vs K.K.R. Majestic Colony Welfare Association AIR 2000 SC 2773* (Hereinafter referred to as *KKR Majestic Colony*)

mentioned earlier, to ensure that the State's actions are not only rational but also necessary and proportionate to its legitimate aims. This approach takes into account the interconnected nature of fundamental rights and the unique circumstances of each case.

In the case of *KKR Majestic Colony*, the court encountered a complex issue involving the use of loudspeakers for reciting prayers in a residential neighborhood. The use of loudspeakers led to disturbances in the peace and tranquility of the area, prompting legal action. The court's decision in this case represents an implicit application of the proportionality standard. Instead of relying on the traditional Essential Religious Practices (ERP) test, the court considered the interplay between Article 25 of the Indian Constitution, which protects the freedom of religion, and the Environment Protection Act.

The ERP test, traditionally used to determine whether a religious practice is essential and deserving of protection, was set aside in favor of a more flexible and context-specific approach. The court's decision underscored that the use of loudspeakers for religious practices was not an essential aspect of the religion in question. However, what makes this case particularly interesting is the court's innovative approach to balancing the competing interests of protecting the freedom of religion and preserving peace in the neighborhood.

The court here used 'decibels' as a threshold to assess proportionality. By linking the use of loudspeakers to specific noise levels, the court aimed to strike a balance between the right to religious expression and the right to a peaceful living environment. This approach is in line with the proportionality standard's core principles, as it considered the suitability and necessity of the State's intervention (in this case, noise regulation) while ensuring that the burdens on individual rights were proportionate to the legitimate aim of preserving public tranquility.

The implicit application of the proportionality test in *KKR Majestic Colony* showcases the judiciary's adaptability in dealing with complex cases where multiple rights are at play. It signifies a departure from rigid and mechanical tests and instead emphasizes a more holistic and balanced approach to resolving legal conflicts.

These cases collectively highlight the evolution of Indian jurisprudence toward a culture of justification, where State actions are rigorously scrutinized to determine their compliance with fundamental rights. The proportionality standard serves as a vital tool in this shift, allowing the judiciary to ensure that State actions are reasonable, necessary, and proportionate, especially when they impact multiple fundamental rights. The integrated proportionality test acknowledges the interconnection of rights, emphasizing the need for a context-specific and nuanced analysis of each case.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the interpretation and application of fundamental rights under the Indian Constitution have evolved significantly over time, marked by landmark cases such as *RC Cooper* and the emergence of the "golden triangle" principle, which collectively interprets Articles 14, 19, and 21. This approach has fundamentally transformed the legal landscape by emphasizing a holistic understanding of fundamental rights and introducing the concept of proportionality in assessing State actions. The "golden triangle" doctrine has been instrumental in harmonizing these fundamental rights, offering greater protection and enhancing the fundamental freedoms of Indian citizens. It is evident that the judiciary's recognition of the interconnection and collective interpretation of these rights transcends the original intent of the Constitution's framers, ultimately serving the broader purpose of safeguarding individual liberties.

However, the restricted application of this integrated approach in specific cases has raised questions about expanding its application to other fundamental rights under the Constitution. While the "golden triangle" doctrine demonstrates a commitment to protecting individual rights in cases where Articles 14, 19, and 21 are implicated, a similar approach should ideally be extended to other provisions within Part III of the Constitution, where fundamental rights are guaranteed.

The concept of proportionality, as demonstrated in cases like *Akshay Patel v. RBI* and *KKR Majestic Colony*, provides a nuanced and context-specific framework for evaluating State actions. This framework ensures that State interventions are not only rational but also necessary and proportionate to their legitimate aims, thereby striking a delicate balance between individual rights and the State's interests.

Furthermore, it is important to address the limitations of the Essential Religious Practices (ERP) test, particularly in the context of Article 25 of the Indian Constitution. The inherent subjectivity and potential for judicial overreach in distinguishing between religious practices and superstitions require careful consideration. A more inclusive and integrated approach, as advocated by Justice Chandrachud, which applies the proportionality standard and balances the rights of religious denominations with those of individual members, can help strike a just and equitable balance.

As India's legal landscape continues to evolve, it is essential that the judiciary remains open to the broader application of the proportionality standard and integrated proportionality framework, ensuring the continued protection and enhancement of individual liberties while

maintaining a delicate equilibrium between the rights of citizens and the legitimate interests of the state. This commitment to justice, fairness, and reasonableness ensures that the Constitution's promise of liberty and equality remains a vibrant reality for all Indian citizens.

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