



Justice K.S. Puttaswamy,
the driving force behind the landmark
privacy judgment a.k.a. 'Aadhar Case',
passes away, leaving a lasting impact on
India's legal legacy.

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As we reflect on his legacy, it's essential to know how judicial interpretations of Article 21 have evolved over time, broadening its scope to encompass various rights and protections. Below is a brief timeline of landmark cases that have significantly shaped the interpretation of Article 21:

A.K. Gopalan v. State of Madras (MANU/SC/0012/1950, 1950 INSC 13)

The Supreme Court held that the "procedure established by law" in Article 21 refers strictly to a law made by the legislature. In this case, personal liberty could be curtailed if a law existed, even if it was unfair or unjust.

Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India 1978 INSC 16; MANU/SC/0133/1978

This landmark case broadened the scope of Article 21. The Court ruled that the procedure established by law must be "fair, just, and reasonable," overturning the earlier Gopalan judgment. It introduced the principle that any law affecting personal liberty must pass the test of reasonableness.

Francis Coralie Mullin v. The Administrator, Union Territory of Delhi 1981 INSC 11, MANU/SC/0517/1981

The Court held that the right to life under Article 21 includes the right to live with human dignity, which covers basic necessities like food, shelter, and clothing.

Bandhua Mukti Morcha v. Union of India 1983 INSC 203; MANU/SC/0051/1983

The Court held that Article 21 includes the right to live with dignity, and the State is responsible for ensuring the protection of bonded laborers, ensuring their right to live a life free from exploitation.
Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation (1985)

P.U.C.L. v. Union of India; 1997 INSC 107; MANU/SC/0274/1997

Known as the "Pavement Dwellers Case," this ruling established that the right to livelihood is also included under the right to life, preventing the forced eviction of slum dwellers without proper rehabilitation.

Olga Tellis vs. Bombay Municipal Corporation (1985): MANU/SC/0039/1985

This case reiterated the stand taken earlier that any procedure that would deprive a person's fundamental rights should conform to the norms of fair play and justice.

Unni Krishnan vs. State of Andhra Pradesh (1993): 1993 INSC 40; MANU/SC/0333/

In this case, the SC upheld the expanded interpretation of the right to life.

Vishakha v. State of Rajasthan (1997 INSC 604; MANU/SC/0786/1997)

This case established that the right to privacy is an integral part of the right to life and personal liberty under Article 21, especially in the context of telephone tapping.

Vishakha v. State of Rajasthan (1997)

The Court expanded Article 21 to include the right to a safe working environment, especially in the context of sexual harassment at the workplace. This case led to the formation of guidelines to protect women from harassment.

Aruna Shanbaug v. Union of India (MANU/SC/0176/2011)

The Court ruled that the right to food is a fundamental right under Article 21, obligating the State to ensure food security for all citizens.

Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) v. Union of India Neutral Citation - 2017 INSC 801; MANU/SC/1044/2017)

In this case, the Supreme Court ruled on the issue of euthanasia and passive euthanasia, stating that it could be allowed under certain conditions, which was seen as an extension of the right to life with dignity.

Shafin Jahan v. Asokan K.M. (Hadiya case) (MANU/SC/0340/2018)

The Supreme Court declared that the right to privacy is a fundamental right under Article 21, significantly expanding the scope of personal liberty.

Common Cause v. Union of India (2018) 2018 INSC 223, MANU/SC/0232/

This ruling emphasized that the right to choose a partner of one's choice falls under the personal liberty guaranteed by Article 21, thereby protecting the right to marry.

The Supreme Court in this case recognized the right to die with dignity as a part of the right to life under Article 21 and laid down guidelines for passive euthanasia and living wills.

These cases illustrate the evolution of Article 21 from a narrow interpretation to one encompassing a wide array of human rights, extending beyond mere survival to include dignity, privacy, and personal autonomy.