

Victim-Centric Governance in the Criminal Justice System: Policy and Practice Analysis with Special Reference to India

Mrs. Ashi Bansal¹ and Dr. Manisha Matolia²

¹Research Scholar, School of Law, IFTM University, Moradabad.

Email: ashibansal2016@gmail.com

²Associate Professor, School of Law, IFTM University, Moradabad

Received: 30/09/2025

Revised: 17/10/2025

Accepted: 18/11/2025

Published: 25/11/2025

ABSTRACT

The traditional criminal justice system, historically focused on the offender and the state, has often side-lined the victim, treating them merely as a witness. However, a global paradigm shift towards victim-centric governance recognizes the victim as a primary stakeholder whose rights, needs, and well-being are central to the pursuit of justice. This paper undertakes a comprehensive analysis of victim-centric governance within the criminal justice system, with a specific focus on India. It examines the evolution of victim rights, scrutinizes key legislative frameworks, judicial pronouncements, and policy initiatives in India designed to empower victims and integrate their concerns into the administration of justice. The paper delves into critical areas such as victims' rights to information, protection, participation, restitution, and compensation, drawing insights from the Criminal Procedure Code, specific statutes like the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, and landmark Supreme Court judgments. Furthermore, it critically assesses the practical implementation of these policies, identifying significant challenges including implementation gaps, resource constraints, lack of awareness, societal stigma, and inter-agency coordination issues. Finally, the paper offers a set of actionable recommendations to bridge the policy-practice divide and foster a genuinely victim-centric criminal justice environment in India, advocating for comprehensive victim rights legislation, enhanced funding, capacity building, and a more robust support infrastructure.

Keywords: Victim-centric governance, criminal justice system, victim rights, India, policy analysis, practice challenges, victim compensation.

INTRODUCTION:

The criminal justice system historically emerged from a need to maintain social order and punish offenders, largely operating as a bipartite dispute between the state and the accused. In this traditional framework, the victim, the individual most directly harmed by the crime, was often relegated to the periphery, serving primarily as a source of evidence for the prosecution. This state-centric or offender-centric approach largely overlooked the profound physical, psychological, social, and financial trauma endured by victims, leading to a phenomenon often termed "secondary victimization" by the system itself.

The latter half of the 20th century witnessed a growing international recognition of victim rights, fueled by academic discourse in victimology and advocacy movements worldwide. This shift culminated in seminal documents such as the United Nations Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power (1985), which laid down foundational principles for the treatment of victims and their entitlements. This global movement has propelled member states, including India, to re-evaluate their criminal justice paradigms and strive towards a more inclusive, compassionate, and "victim-centric" approach.

Victim-centric governance, in essence, posits that the needs, rights, and interests of the victim should be at the core of the criminal justice process, from the reporting of the crime through investigation, prosecution, trial, sentencing, and post-conviction phases. It demands not only the recognition of victims' legal standing but also the provision of adequate support, protection, and opportunities for participation, restitution, and rehabilitation.

India, a nation with a vast and complex criminal justice system inherited from its colonial past, has made significant strides in incorporating victim rights into its legal framework. Amendments to the Criminal Procedure Code (Cr.P.C), enactment of specific protective statutes, and a series of transformative judicial pronouncements reflect a conscious effort to move towards a victim-centric model. However, the gap between legislative intent and practical implementation remains a formidable challenge.

This paper aims to undertake a detailed policy and practice analysis of victim-centric governance in the Indian criminal justice system. It will critically examine the existing legal and policy landscape, highlighting both achievements and shortcomings. By analyzing the experiences on the ground, the paper seeks to identify

the systemic, infrastructural, and attitudinal barriers that impede the full realization of victim rights. Ultimately, it will propose actionable recommendations to strengthen victim-centric governance, ensuring that justice is not only served for the state and the offender but, crucially, for the victim as well.

CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING GOVERNANCE

FRAMEWORK: VICTIM-CENTRIC

Victim-centric governance represents a philosophical and practical reorientation of the criminal justice system, moving away from a primary focus on punishing the offender or asserting state authority, towards prioritizing the well-being, dignity, and recovery of the individual harmed by crime. It is rooted in the recognition that crime is not merely an offense against the state but a deeply personal violation with profound and lasting consequences for the victim.

At its core, victim-centric governance embodies several key principles:

Recognition of Victimhood: Acknowledging the victim as a legitimate and central stakeholder in the justice process, not merely a witness or a passive recipient of state action. This involves recognizing the diverse forms of victimization and the unique needs arising from them.

Rights-Based Approach: Framing victim provisions as fundamental entitlements rather than discretionary gestures. These rights typically include the right to information, protection, participation, restitution, and compensation.

Dignity and Respect: Ensuring that victims are treated with empathy, respect, and sensitivity throughout their interaction with the criminal justice system, minimizing the risk of secondary victimization.

Empowerment and Participation: Providing victims with opportunities to voice their concerns, contribute to decision-making processes, and exercise choice, thereby fostering a sense of agency rather than helplessness.

Holistic Support and Rehabilitation: Moving beyond punitive measures to encompass comprehensive support services, including medical, psychological, legal, and financial aid, aimed at facilitating the victim's recovery and reintegration into society.

Accountability: Ensuring that the justice system, and where applicable, the offender, is accountable not just to the state, but directly to the victim for the harm caused. The shift towards victim-centric governance is a departure from the traditional adversarial model, where victims were often seen as either a tool for the prosecution or an object of cross-examination. Instead, it advocates for a more restorative or participatory approach, where the harm caused to the individual is central, and efforts are made to repair that harm and acknowledge the victim's perspective.

Key components of victim-centric governance include:

Right to Information: Victims should be informed about the progress of their case, their rights, available support services, and the release of the offender. Victims are entitled to be kept informed about the progress of their case, including investigation updates, court dates, and major procedural developments. They must also be made aware of their legal rights and the various support services available to them, such as counselling, legal aid, and shelter facilities. Equally important is timely communication regarding the release, bail, or escape of the accused, as such information directly affects the victim's sense of safety. By keeping victims well-informed, the justice system not only empowers them to participate meaningfully in proceedings but also upholds their dignity and emotional security during a difficult and often overwhelming process.

Right to Privacy: Privacy is said to be to act as protection of an individual based on the norms and values of the society. Privacy of a victim ensures protection of victim information pertaining to diary entries, Facebook account, email, mobile phone, computer hard disk, online searches. Disclosure of this information may result in consequences such as re-victimisation of the already victimised, decline in participating in court proceeding and non-reporting of crime. This becomes especially important for victims of sexual assault and child victim who would be now in a position to choose who will get information, what amount of information and when the information will be released⁸⁶. Privacy and rights of victims goes hand in hand. It makes victims feel secured and empowered

Right to Protection: Measures to protect victims and witnesses from intimidation, retaliation, and further harm, including physical security and privacy. Under U.S. law, the protection of victims from intimidation, harassment, or any form of abuse is grounded in broad constitutional principles. This protection is operationalized primarily through the Crime Victims' Rights Act (CVRA), which safeguards the physical, emotional, and psychological well-being of victims throughout the criminal justice process. The Act empowers victims to seek protective measures, particularly when an accused person is released on bail or attempts any form of contact. Typical safeguards include no-contact orders, restrictions preventing the accused from approaching the victim or their family, and prohibitions against communication through digital or social media platforms. However, the effective exercise of these protections depends on the victim's awareness and access to the relevant information. Without being informed of their statutory rights, victims cannot adequately assert their entitlement to safety.

Right to Participation: Opportunities for victims to present their views and concerns at critical stages of the justice process, such as bail hearings, sentencing, and parole decisions.

Right to Restitution: The right to receive financial or material compensation for damages, losses, or injuries directly resulting from the crime, ideally from the

offender. The right to restitution constitutes one of the most fundamental entitlements of victims within the criminal justice system, signifying a gradual shift in their position from passive sufferers to recognized survivors. Restitution, in its broadest sense, refers to the financial compensation provided by the offender to the victim for losses resulting from the crime. Traditionally, such monetary awards are issued at the stage of sentencing, often in the form of fines or compensation orders.

When courts determine restitution, they are expected to adopt a holistic approach, considering a wide range of potential losses, including:

a) Income loss of present and future. b) Hospitalisation (past and future medical assistance). c) Childcare. d) Transportation. e) Property. f) Loss of vision. g) Attorney fees. h) Funeral.

Right to Compensation: State-funded financial assistance for victims, particularly when restitution from the offender is not feasible or adequate, to cover medical expenses, loss of earnings, and pain and suffering.

Right to Assistance and Support: Access to medical, psychological, social, and legal aid services tailored to their specific needs.

Understanding these foundational principles and components is crucial for evaluating the extent to which India's criminal justice system has genuinely embraced a victim-centric approach.

3. Historical and Global Context of Victim Rights

The journey towards recognizing victim rights is a relatively modern phenomenon. Historically, many ancient legal systems, such as early Roman law or Anglo-Saxon law, often emphasized restitution to victims, with crimes viewed more as private wrongs than public offenses. However, with the rise of centralized states and the concept of "King's Peace," the state gradually appropriated the right and duty to prosecute crimes. This transition, beginning in the late medieval period and solidifying in the modern era, shifted the focus from the victim's harm to the state's breach of law, effectively marginalizing the victim in the criminal justice process.

The mid-20th century marked a resurgence of interest in victims. The development of distinct academic discipline of victimology in the 1940s and 1950s, pioneered by scholars like Benjamin Mendelsohn and Hans von Hentig, began to systematically study the victim's role, characteristics, and experiences. Early victimological research, while sometimes problematic in its focus on "victim precipitation," nevertheless brought the victim into academic discourse.

The 1960s and 1970s witnessed the growth of victim advocacy movements, particularly in response to sexual violence and domestic abuse, which highlighted the systemic failures of the justice system to adequately respond to victims' needs. These movements galvanized

public opinion and put pressure on governments to enact reforms.

A pivotal moment arrived in 1985 with the adoption of the United Nations Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power. This landmark document provided a universally accepted framework for victim rights, elaborating on definitions of victims, their rights to access to justice, restitution, compensation, and assistance. It urged member states to incorporate these principles into their national legislation and practices.

Following the UN Declaration, many countries worldwide began to introduce comprehensive victim rights legislation, establish victim compensation schemes, and integrate victim support services within their criminal justice systems. Jurisdictions like the United States, Canada, Australia, and various European nations have implemented constitutional amendments, statutory reforms (e.g., Victim's Bill of Rights), and institutional mechanisms (e.g., victim advocacy programs, victim impact statements) to ensure victims' rights are protected and promoted.

India, as a signatory to numerous international human rights instruments and influenced by these global trends, has progressively engaged in legal and policy reforms aimed at victim empowerment. While the traditional Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) were largely offender-centric, subsequent amendments and new legislations reflect a conscious effort to align with global best practices and constitutional mandates for justice and human dignity. This historical trajectory provides the essential backdrop against which India's specific policy and practice landscape must be understood.

4. Victim-Centric Governance in India: Policy Analysis

India's journey towards victim-centric governance is marked by a series of legislative amendments, new enactments, and significant judicial interventions. While a standalone comprehensive victim rights legislation is yet to materialize, various provisions across different statutes collectively aim to secure victim rights.

4.1. Constitutional Mandate The foundation for victim rights in India lies in the overarching principles of the Constitution. Article 14 guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of the laws, ensuring that victims are not discriminated against. More critically, Article 21, the right to life and personal liberty, has been expansively interpreted by the Supreme Court to encompass the right to live with dignity, speedy trial, legal aid, and protection from cruel and unusual punishment – all of which have direct implications for victims. The right to justice, implicit in the Constitution, necessitates that victims receive fair treatment and redressal.

4.2. Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC), 1973 (as amended) The CrPC, the procedural backbone of

How to cite: Mrs. Ashi Bansal and Manisha Matolia. Victim-Centric Governance in the Criminal Justice System: Policy and Practice Analysis with Special Reference to India. *Advances in Consumer Research*. 2025;2(5):2128–2134

criminal justice in India, has undergone significant amendments, particularly in 2008 and 2018, to incorporate victim-centric provisions:

Victim Compensation Scheme (Section 357A): Introduced by the 2008 amendment, this is a landmark provision empowering every State Government, in coordination with NALSA, to prepare a scheme for providing funds for compensation to victims or their dependents who have suffered loss or injury as a result of the crime and require rehabilitation. The compensation is awarded irrespective of the conviction or acquittal of the accused, and the quantum depends on the harm caused, medical expenses, and loss of livelihood.

Victim's Right to Appeal (Proviso to Section 372): Also introduced in 2008, victims now have the right to prefer an appeal against any order of acquittal, conviction for a lesser offence, or inadequacy of compensation. This grants victims a direct avenue for challenging adverse judicial outcomes previously reserved for the State.

Right to Legal Aid: While not exclusive to victims, provisions under Sections 303 and 304 of the CrPC ensure the right to be defended by a legal practitioner, and free legal aid for indigent persons. This is crucial for victims, especially those from marginalized communities, to navigate the complex legal system.

Participation in Proceedings: While the CrPC traditionally gave limited direct participatory space to victims, Section 24(8) allows a victim to engage an advocate of their choice to assist the prosecution¹². This provides a formal mechanism for victims' counsel to actively engage in the trial.

Information Rights (Implied): Although not explicitly codified as a comprehensive "right to information" in the CrPC, judicial pronouncements and general principles suggest that victims should be informed about the progress of the investigation and trial at various stages.

Protection of Victims (Section 164A (1) Cr.P.C.): Mandates medical examination of a victim of rape within 24 hours to collect evidence, emphasizing the collection of evidence in a sensitive manner.

4.3. Specific Legislation

India has enacted several special laws that are inherently victim-centric, particularly for vulnerable groups:

Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012: This Act is a benchmark for victim-centric legislation. It mandates child-friendly procedures, special courts, protection of identity, recording of statements in a sensitive manner (preferably by female officers), legal aid, and compensatory provisions. The Act prioritizes the child's best interest and provides for rehabilitation services.

Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 (Nirbhaya Act) & 2018: Following the Delhi gang rape case, these amendments introduced stringent punishments for

sexual offenses, redefined "rape," criminalized specific acts like acid attacks, and mandated speedier trials. Crucially, they introduced provisions for mandatory medical examination of rape victims, collection of evidence, and increased compensation for victims of sexual assault.

Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 (PWDVA): This civil law provides for protection orders, residence orders, monetary relief, custody orders, and access to support services for women subjected to domestic violence. Its focus is on immediate relief and protection, directly empowering victims to seek redress outside the criminal justice system, though it can run parallel.

Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 (SC/ST Act): This Act aims to prevent atrocities against SC/ST communities and provides for special courts, speedy trials, and comprehensive relief and rehabilitation for victims, including economic support and restoration of dignity.

Witness Protection Scheme, 2018: Formalized by the Supreme Court, this scheme provides a framework for protecting witnesses, including victims, from intimidation and threats during investigation and trial. It categorizes threats and prescribes protection measures ranging from identity concealment to safe houses.

4.4. Role of Judiciary the Indian judiciary, particularly the Supreme Court, has played a proactive role in expanding victim rights through landmark judgments:

Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan (1997): Laid down guidelines for preventing sexual harassment at the workplace, treating it as a violation of women's fundamental rights and creating a framework for redressal.

Sakshi v. Union of India (2004): Emphasized the need for child-friendly procedures in sexual assault cases, advocating for in-camera trials and protection of the child's identity. These principles were later integrated into the POCSO Act.

Laxmi v. Union of India (2015): Directed states to formulate victim compensation schemes for acid attack victims and regulate the sale of acid, acknowledging the life-altering impact of such crimes.

State of Gujarat v. High Court of Gujarat (1998): Highlighted the need for a victim compensation scheme, paving the way for Section 357A of the Cr.P.C.

Various judgments have also stressed the importance of timely investigation, speedy trial, and adequate compensation, thus reinforcing the victim's right to efficacious justice.

4.5. National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) & National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) NCRB collects and publishes data on crimes, including those against women and children, providing crucial insights

into patterns of victimization. NALSA, established under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, plays a vital role in implementing legal aid programs and overseeing the State Legal Services Authorities to ensure access to justice, including for victims. NALSA has formulated model victim compensation schemes and guidelines to standardize the process across states.

Despite these significant policy advancements, the effective implementation of victim-centric governance in India faces considerable hurdles, as discussed in the subsequent section.

5. Victim-Centric Governance in India: Practice Analysis & Challenges

While India has made commendable policy strides towards victim-centric governance, the chasm between legislative intent and ground reality remains substantial. The effective implementation of victim rights faces a multitude of challenges, ranging from systemic deficiencies to societal attitudes.

5.1. Implementation Gaps and Disparity: The most significant challenge is the uneven and often inadequate implementation of progressive policies. While the CrPC mandates victim compensation schemes (VCS) under Section 357A, the actual formulation and implementation vary widely across states. Many states either lack comprehensive schemes, have insufficiently funded ones, or face bureaucratic hurdles in disbursing compensation. The National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) has issued model schemes, but their adoption and effective operationalization are inconsistent.

5.2. Awareness and Accessibility: A large proportion of victims, especially those from underprivileged and marginalized sections of society, remain unaware of their rights, the compensation schemes, legal aid provisions, or the availability of support services. This lack of awareness is compounded by limited access to information, particularly in rural and remote areas. The complexity of legal procedures often deters victims from pursuing their rights.

5.3. Funding and Resource Constraints: The efficacy of victim compensation schemes and support services is heavily dependent on adequate allocation of funds. Many state governments allocate meager budgets for victim welfare, rendering compensation amounts insufficient and delayed. The infrastructure for victim support, such as dedicated victim support cells, safe houses, and counselling services, is severely underfunded and underdeveloped. There's a critical shortage of trained personnel, including counsellors and social workers, to provide holistic support.

5.4. Infrastructure Deficiencies: Specialized infrastructure mandated by laws like the POCSO Act (e.g., child-friendly courts, separate waiting rooms) is often lacking. The absence of sufficient forensic labs and trained personnel also hampers scientific investigation, prolonging justice for victims. The Witness Protection Scheme, 2018, though a positive step, requires robust

infrastructure and funding to ensure effective implementation across all districts.

5.5. Police Sensitivity and Training: The initial point of contact for a victim is often the police. Lack of sensitivity, empathy, and specialized training among police personnel can lead to secondary victimization, trauma, and a reluctance to report crimes, especially in cases of sexual assault or domestic violence. Gender-insensitive questioning, delays in FIR registration, and procedural lapses remain prevalent. While some initiatives for gender sensitization training exist, their reach and impact are not universal.

5.6. Judicial Delays and Procedural Hurdles: The notoriously slow pace of the Indian judicial system poses a significant challenge. Prolonged trials, frequent adjournments, and an overburdened judiciary cause immense distress to victims, leading to mental and financial exhaustion. This often forces victims or their families to withdraw from cases or accept inadequate compromises. The right to speedy trial, though constitutionally recognized, remains elusive for many.

5.7. Social Stigma and Discrimination: Victims of certain crimes, particularly sexual assault, domestic violence, and caste-based atrocities, face severe social stigma and discrimination. This "blame the victim" mentality, deeply entrenched in societal norms, often prevents victims from reporting crimes or seeking justice, fearing ostracization and further harm to their reputation. The victim's family may also face social pressure, leading to a climate of silence and impunity.

5.8. Witness Intimidation and Protection: Despite the Witness Protection Scheme, fear of intimidation, threats, and actual violence from offenders or their associates remains a significant barrier to victims and witnesses cooperating with the justice system. The practical implementation of protection measures, especially for vulnerable witnesses in sensitive cases, is challenging due to resource constraints and logistical difficulties.

5.9. Restitution and Rehabilitation: While compensation is a step, holistic rehabilitation that addresses the psychological, social, and economic needs of victims is often neglected. The focus tends to be on monetary compensation rather than comprehensive restorative justice approaches that involve counselling, skill development, and reintegration support. Restitution from the offender, though desirable, is rarely enforced effectively in many cases.

5.10. Inter-agency Coordination: Effective victim-centric governance requires seamless coordination among various stakeholders: police, prosecution, judiciary, medical services, social welfare departments, and NGOs. Often, these agencies operate in silos, leading to fragmented services, communication gaps, and administrative inefficiencies, ultimately impacting the victim's ability to access holistic support.

These practical challenges underscore the need for a multi-pronged approach that goes beyond mere legislative reforms to focus on robust implementation, resource allocation, capacity building, and a fundamental shift in societal attitudes towards victims.

6. Recommendations for Enhancing Victim-Centric Governance in India

To bridge the gap between policy intent and ground reality in India's victim-centric governance, a concerted and multi-faceted approach is required. The following recommendations aim to strengthen the framework and ensure a more empathetic and effective justice system for victims:

6.1. Enactment of a Comprehensive Victim Rights Legislation: India needs a unified, standalone legislation that codifies all victim rights, defining their entitlements and providing a clear framework for their enforcement, irrespective of the specific crime. This law should outline: Universal rights to information, protection, participation, restitution, compensation, and support services. Mechanisms for effective enforcement, monitoring, and grievance redressal. Specific provisions for vulnerable victims (e.g., children, women, SC/ST, disabled persons). A dedicated Victim Commissioner or Victim's Ombudsman for oversight and advocacy.

6.2. Robust Funding and Infrastructure Development:
Dedicated Victim Welfare Fund: Establish a substantially funded, non-lapsable national victim welfare fund, with mandatory contributions from states and potentially from correctional facilities (e.g., prison industries), ensuring adequate and timely compensation.
Expand Support Infrastructure: Set up easily accessible, well-resourced 'Victim Support Centers' in every district, offering integrated services including legal aid, psychological counselling, medical assistance, temporary shelter, and vocational training.
Specialized Facilities: Enhance and expand specialized courts (e.g., POCSO Courts, Fast Track Courts) with child-friendly infrastructure and separate waiting rooms for victims. Invest in advanced forensic capabilities and sufficient personnel.

6.3. Capacity Building and Sensitization Training:
Mandatory Training: Implement mandatory and recurring training programs for all criminal justice functionaries – police, prosecutors, judges, legal aid lawyers, and medical personnel – on victim sensitivity, trauma-informed care, human rights, and the specific provisions of victim-centric laws.
Gender and Child Sensitivity: Emphasize specialized training modules focusing on gender-based violence and child abuse, including proper investigative techniques, respectful communication, and understanding of psychological impacts.
Recruitment of Specialists: Recruit trained counsellors, social workers, and victim advocates to be integral parts of police stations, courts, and victim support centers.

6.4. Public Awareness Campaigns: Launch nationwide, multi-lingual public awareness campaigns using diverse

media (print, electronic, social media, community radio) to educate citizens about their rights as victims, available legal aid, compensation schemes, and support services. Collaborate with NGOs and civil society organizations to conduct outreach programs in rural and remote areas.
6.5. Strengthening Legal Aid Services for Victims:
Victim-Specific Legal Aid: NALSA and State Legal Services Authorities should establish dedicated victim legal aid cells with specialized lawyers trained in victim advocacy.
Proactive Outreach: Legal aid services should proactively reach out to victims, especially those admitted to hospitals or reporting crimes at police stations, to inform them of their rights and offer immediate assistance.

6.6. Effective Implementation of Witness Protection Scheme: Ensure strict and uniform implementation of the Witness Protection Scheme, 2018, across all states and Union Territories, with adequate funds and dedicated personnel. Prioritize threat assessment and provide appropriate protection measures for victims and witnesses, including identity concealment, safe houses, and security escorts where necessary.

6.7. Promoting Restorative Justice Practices: Explore and integrate restorative justice principles and practices, such as victim-offender mediation, where appropriate and voluntary, fostering dialogue, understanding, and reparation of harm, focusing on the victim's healing and empowerment. Develop guidelines for judicial discretion in recommending such programs.

6.8. Robust Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms: Establish independent monitoring bodies, potentially including civil society representatives, to regularly assess the implementation of victim-centric policies, the disbursement of compensation, and the functioning of victim support services. Mandate regular public reporting on the status of victim rights and services at national and state levels, including disaggregated data on types of crimes, victim demographics, and compensation amounts.

6.9. Inter-Agency Coordination and Collaboration: Mandate the formation of inter-agency coordination committees at district and state levels, comprising representatives from police, prosecution, judiciary, health, social welfare, and legal services, to ensure seamless information flow and coordinated delivery of services to victims. Develop standardized protocols and referral mechanisms for victim services across all agencies.

6.10. Technological Integration: Develop user-friendly online portals and mobile applications for victims to report crimes, track case status, access information on their rights, and apply for compensation and support services. Utilize technology for secure, remote recording of victim statements where necessary, minimizing repeated appearances in court.

By systematically addressing these recommendations, India can move closer to its constitutional promise of

justice for all, ensuring that victims are truly at the heart of the criminal justice system, receiving not just legal redress but holistic support for their recovery and reintegration.

CONCLUSION

The journey towards a truly victim-centric criminal justice system in India reflects a crucial evolution in the understanding of justice itself. From a historically offender-centric model, India has progressively incorporated the rights and needs of victims into its legal and policy frameworks. The amendments to the CrPC, the enactment of specialized statutes like the POCSO Act and the PWDVA, and the proactive stance of the judiciary have collectively laid a robust foundation for victim-centric governance. These policies recognize the victim as a principal stakeholder, affording them rights to information, protection, participation, restitution, and compensation, thereby moving beyond their traditional role as mere witnesses.

However, the analysis of policy and practice reveals a significant disparity between the progressive legislative intent and the often-grim reality on the ground. Implementation gaps, characterized by inadequate funding, insufficient infrastructure, lack of awareness, and inconsistent application of schemes, continue to impede the full realization of victim rights. Challenges such as police insensitivity, judicial delays, pervasive social stigma, and fragmented inter-agency coordination further exacerbate the plight of victims, often leading to secondary victimization and a loss of faith in the justice system. The Witness Protection Scheme, while a significant step, also faces practical hurdles in its comprehensive execution.

Moving forward, India must embark on a renewed commitment to bridging this policy-practice divide. The recommendations outlined – including the enactment of a comprehensive victim rights legislation, robust funding for victim welfare funds and support infrastructure, mandatory capacity building for all justice functionaries, and extensive public awareness campaigns – are critical steps. Strengthening legal aid services, ensuring the effective implementation of witness protection, promoting restorative justice principles, and fostering seamless inter-agency coordination are equally vital.

Ultimately, a genuinely victim-centric criminal justice system is not merely about punitive measures against offenders; it is about restoring dignity, facilitating healing, and ensuring comprehensive support for those who have suffered harm. India's democratic ethos and constitutional promise of justice demand a system that is compassionate, efficient, and equitable for all its citizens, especially its most vulnerable – the victims of crime. The path ahead requires sustained political will, dedicated resource allocation, and a fundamental societal shift towards empathy and accountability to truly embed victims at the heart of justice delivery.

REFERENCES

1. Voltaire. *Selected Writings of Voltaire*. Edited by William F. Bottiglia, Bobbs-Merrill, 1962. (Placeholder entry — replace with the specific work if you intended one.)
2. Ashworth, Andrew. “Victims’ Rights, Defendants’ Rights and Criminal Procedure.” *The Criminal Law Review*, 2009, pp. 395–411.
3. Basu, D. D. *Shorter Constitution of India*. LexisNexis, 2018.
4. *Code of Criminal Procedure*, No. 2 of 1974, India Code, 1973. §§ 24(8), 357A.
5. *Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power*. United Nations General Assembly, Resolution A/RES/40/34, 29 Nov. 1985.
6. Law Commission of India. *239th Report on Expeditious Investigation and Trial of Criminal Cases against Influential Persons*, 2012, pp. 49–50.
7. *Legal Services Authorities Act*, No. 39 of 1987, India Code, 1987.
8. Laxmi v. Union of India, (2014) 4 SCC 427.
9. Mahender Chawla v. Union of India, (2019) 14 SCC 615.
10. Maine, Henry Sumner. *Ancient Law: Its Connection with the Early History of Society, and Its Relation to Modern Ideas*. John Murray, 1861.
11. Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India, AIR 1978 SC 597.
12. Mendelsohn, Benjamin. “The Victimology.” *Revue Internationale de Criminologie et de Police Technique*, vol. 10, 1956, pp. 25–36.
13. Mendiratta, Namrata. “Criminal Justice System and Victims in India: The Promise and the Peril.” *Legal News and Views*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2017, pp. 1–15.
14. *National Legal Services Authority (Victim Compensation Scheme) Regulations*, 2022.
15. Sakshi v. Union of India, (2004) 5 SCC 518.
16. *The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act*, No. 32 of 2012, India Code, 2012.
17. Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan, AIR 1997 SC 3011.
18. Waller, Irvin. *Victimology: A Text/Reader*. SAGE Publications, 2011.
19. Zehr, Howard. *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*. Good Books, 2002.